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Byzantium viewed by the Arabs

El Cheikh-Saliba, Nadia Maria, Ph.D.

Harvard University, 1992

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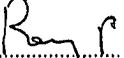
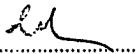
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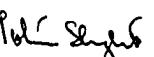
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BYZANTIUM VIEWED BY THE ARABS

a thesis presented

by

Nadia Maria El Cheikh-Saliba

The Committee on the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History
and Middle Eastern Studies

In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the subject of
History and Middle Eastern Studies
Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts

April, 1992

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ABSTRACT

The thesis intends to fill a gap in the information that we have on the relations between the Byzantines and the Arabs, namely the image of the Byzantines as it is reflected in Arabic sources. I have used well-known and popular texts in my quest to find the common image that the Arab Muslims had of their main rival. The Arabic descriptions are often trapped between the attraction of the Byzantines conjointly with their status as their main military and cultural rival. Therefore, they vacillated between positive and negative, between praise and condemnation while transpiring in ambiguity with respect to certain facets of Byzantine culture and civilization.

Thus, the descriptions of the personal and moral characteristics of the Byzantines are bluntly negative while in other aspects, the Byzantine artisanal and architectural skills, for instance, the Arabs praise the Byzantines as being the supreme masters. The appraisal of Byzantine scientific and philosophical knowledge reveals, however, a clear ambiguity. In the description of the Byzantine emperors the Arabic sources betray a gradually developing negative imagery, as the contrast between the descriptions of Emperors Heraclius and Nicephorus Phocas reveal. The impact of Byzantine ceremonial on the authors and on the Islamic state is reflected in the Arabic sources. Constantinople is at the center of the discussion: physical and symbolic references to Constantinople abound at the expense of the rest of the Empire. Throughout our sources, Constantinople plays a paramount role in the Muslim general perception of the Byzantine Empire and, in some sense, even shaping it. In studying the Arabs' view of Byzantium, the thesis always tried to offer a glimpse at the Arabs' own morality, values, sense of history and of themselves.

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INTRODUCTION

Familiarity breeds contempt; proximity can nourish love and hate with equal ease. The history of the Muslim Arabs' relations with their neighbors in Christian Byzantium reveals a complex of feelings that ranges from fear, jealousy and admiration to the desperate need to denigrate, to scorn and to a well-rooted hatred. From the first day of Islamic expansion, the Islamic community was in a state of constant enmity with the Byzantine Empire. With the collapse of the Persian Empire, The Byzantine state was the primary challenge to the Islamic community and soon expeditions against Byzantine territory were undertaken year after year on a regular basis. In spite of this perpetual antagonism, the greatness of Byzantine civilization was in Islam's early centuries at least, the foil against which the burgeoning empire tested itself. They were the enemy par excellence, but by the same token maintained a standard against which Muslims judged the degree of civilization to which they themselves had attained. This relationship of enmity and admiration resulted in an attitude of ambivalence that is consistently projected through the Arabic sources. The Muslims tend to be positive with respect to achievements which are concrete and irrefutable while where

the achievements and traits are more abstract, there is room for the Muslims to vent their hostility and scorn. I intend to discuss the way in which this ambivalence was manifested in the areas of science, the material culture and the personal characteristics of the Byzantines.

My main historical framework is an Arabic-Islamic one that takes into account events happening simultaneously in the Byzantine Empire. Developments taking place in both Empires have to be kept constantly in mind, since new attitudes can be reflections or responses to new emerging situations. I have selected my sources from within the period stretching from the seventh to the end of the eleventh century. The twelfth century is a plausible final date because of a number of major developments in the history of the Near East. It is around this time that the Turks were asserting their presence especially following the battle of Manzikert in 1071. The year 1097 witnessed the arrival of the First Crusade to Antioch. We have thus the appearance of two new peoples in the area who, to some extent, were displacing the original competitors, i.e. the Arabs and the Byzantines. In the Byzantine Empire a new dynasty, that of the Comnenoi, was inaugurating a new phase in the history of the Empire with a new ideological orientation which had an impact on mentalities and public opinion. As well as being a historically valid period, this limit is adequate because the image of the Byzantine Empire does not change significantly afterwards in the Arabic texts and its evocation will then be dealing with Turkish rather than Arab history.

Most of the Arabic sources that mention the Byzantine Empire are oriental. Nonetheless, the Muslim Occident, both as an actor

and provider of information, is not absent; its appearance is, however, brief and disconnected. My research concentrates mainly on prose texts, both religious and secular. Poetry is included mostly in contexts where the verses emanate from prose texts and as part and parcel of the events of a description. All the sources that have been used are published. The published Arabic material is voluminous and I find it a more useful approach to provide, with the support of facts already known, a new insight into the Arabic-Muslim society and culture. New sources are, thus, relinquished for the sake of a new perspective.¹ I do not attempt any literary criticism or literary history. I am using literature as a historical source, and am concerned with how the texts presented the Byzantines to the public. Being concerned with the content of a convention, I use material from different dates often to illustrate the durability of a specific tradition.²

References to the Byzantines in the Arabic sources can be found in Qur'ān exegesis or *tafsīr*, in the Traditions of the Prophet Muḥammad or *ḥadīth*, in biographical literature, historical and geographical works, works of 'adab, popular tales and poetry. These categories are not clearly delineated and numerous works cannot be assigned exclusively to any one of them, because they tend to cover a wide range of subjects.

¹In an article entitled "L'orientalisme aujourd'hui," Lucette Valensi suggests a new reading of the classical texts, "pour saisir l'épitémé des sociétés qui les ont produits. Saisir non pas la lettre, mais l'esprit." *Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Civilizations* 25(1980#3-4), pp.415-417.

²For a similar approach see the work of Norman Daniel, *Heroes and Saracens, An Interpretation of the Chanson de Geste* (Cambridge, 1984).

Several Islamicists have pointed to the nature of the problems attached to Islamic historiography whereby it is difficult to find what "really" happened. Here we are not concerned with the value of historical works as a source material for the writing of the history of a particular period since the goal is to comprehend the way in which the Muslims understood their relation to another power, Byzantium, and the place of this power in their world view. A point to keep in mind is not to equate Arab historiography with Muslim historiography for there is a non-Arab Muslim historiography as well as a Christian Arab historiography. I am not concerned with either. My focus is on Arab Islamic historiography and here I am using the term Muslim in a restricted cultural sense, referring to the civilization that took shape mostly in Damascus and Baghdad from the seventh to the end of the eleventh centuries.

The most important names in "Conquest Literature", *futūh*, are Muḥammad al-Wāqidi (b.130/747) who wrote *al Maghāzi wa Futūh al Shām*; Ahmad al-Balādhuri (d.279/842) author of *Futūh al-Buldān*; Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam(d.257/871) who wrote *Futūh Miṣr wal Maghrib wal 'Andalus*; Abu 'Ismail al-'Azdī, author of *Kitāb Futūh al-Shām*; and Ibn al-'A who composed his *Kitāb al-Futūh* in 204/819. *Futūh* literature constitutes a major source for the early history of the Arabs and is important for its depiction of the first encounters between Arabs and Byzantines.

The general tone of the Arab accounts is primarily historical rather than mythological. Their concept of history was that of transmitted facts. This does not mean that the personal

convictions of the historian were kept out of his work as his main weapon was his freedom to omit or add material to his work. For the Arab authors, Islamic history was preceded either by a Biblical history or by a Persian one and soon enough the two were juxtaposed. The Muslim authors were almost indifferent to Greek and Roman history. External wars and internal dissension occupy, in the majority of the works, a somewhat exclusive space. Although Muslim chroniclers have much to say about the war on the frontiers, the external interests of Muslim historiography were limited to the prehistory of the Islamic community and to the earlier period. With few exceptions, they did not extend to the history of alien peoples and cultures.³ They were normally well acquainted with the names of the Byzantine rulers and the approximate dates of their rule. In addition, at times, the historians show a familiarity with events and facts concerning the Byzantine Empire which are quite accurate.

The best known historical digests are the *Tārikh* of al-Ya‘qūbī (d. 283/897) and *al-’Akhbār al-Tiwāl* of Abu Ḥanīfa al-Dīnawarī (d. 281/894) which provide quick and rather synthetical exposés. Al-Dīnawarī's work is characterized by a quasi-exclusive interest in Iranian pre-Islamic and Islamic history. Al-Ya‘qūbī reflected in his work an ecumenical mind dealing in the first part with pre-Islamic history and enumerating the Israelites, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Indians, the Greeks, the Rum, the Chinese and others. The second part of the book gives the history of the Caliphate up to the year 259/872.

³ Bernard Lewis, "The Use by Muslim Historians of non-Muslim Sources," *Historians of the Middle East*, eds. B. Lewis and P.M. Holt (London, 1962), pp. 180-191.

Both do not give a chronological account but start with events and incidents from their inception until their end. Ibn Qutaiba (d. 276/889) wrote a small historical work, *Kitāb al-Ma'ārif* which reflected the prevailing orthodoxy of the times of al-Mutawwakil (232–247/847–861); Another important text is The anonymous *Kitāb al-'Uyūn* which dates from the late eleventh century and which includes the narrative of Maslama's expedition against Constantinople between 715/97 and 717/97.⁴

The culminating point of Arab annalistic historiography was reached around the year 300 in the work of Abū Ja'far Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (225–310/839–923) *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk* which stops in July 915. Annalistic history is primarily concerned with bare facts which were, in theory at least, recorded by contemporary sources and could not be corrected, improved or enlarged by any later writer.⁵ Tabari's *Tārīkh* is a monumental corpus which preserves the broadest cross section of earlier historical writing and which represents the ancient historical tradition. An important shortcoming is that he mentions Egypt and Syria far less frequently than the oriental part of the Muslim Empire and he practically ignores its western part.

Hamza al-Isfahānī (284–356/897–967) wrote a very succinct universal history in the mid-tenth century presenting the

⁴E.W. Brooks, "The Campaign of 716–718 From Arabic Sources," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 19(1899), pp.19–33.

⁵F. Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography*, pp.76–77, states that Greek chronicles of the period when Islam came into being represent exactly the type of annalistic history we find in later Muslim works, the best example of such Greek chronicles being Ioannes Malalas. Rosenthal concludes that Muslim annalistic history, in its beginning, was indebted to Greek Syriac models.

chronology of the various nations known to him, including the Byzantines but mainly entertaining the length of the reigns of the rulers. He called his work *Tārikh sini Mulūk al-'Ard wal 'anbiyā'* [Chronology of the Kings of the Earth and the Prophets]. Al-Bairūnī (362-390/973-1000) was one of the greatest scholars of medieval Islam. He wrote *Kitāb al-'Athār al-Bāqiya* [The Chronology of Ancient Nations].

In biographical literature the most important work is the *Sīra* of the Prophet by Ibn Hishām (d. 213/828). The oldest representative of Muslim biographical literature on a large scale, other than the *Sīra*, is the biography of 'Umar Ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz by Muḥammad 'Abdallāh Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam (155-124/727-829). It depicts the Umayyad Caliph 'Umar II (99-101/717-720) as the ideal ruler by bringing together edifying anecdotes, his sermons, prayers, official correspondence and his dealings with people.⁶ Another work, not exactly a *sīra*, but certainly a work of panegyric is *Kitāb al-Majālis wal Musāyarāt* written about 351/962-3 by al-Qādī al-Nū'mān who was an intimate of the Fatimid Caliph al-Mu'izz (341-365/946-975) and one of the foremost theologians of the Ismaili sect.

Another body of sources which can provide some insight on the image that the Arabs had of the Byzantines are the Qur'ān commentaries. These have been neglected in historical research although they constitute a rich historical source. The commentaries are extremely valuable as a reflection of a contemporary mentality. Traditional exegesis reached a high point and a certain finality in the activity of Ibn Jarīr al-

⁶ Franz Rosenthal, "Ibn Abd al-Hakam," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, New Edition, pp. 674-5.

Tabari (d. 310/923) whose commentary, *Jām'i al-Bayān fi Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, brought together the entire breadth of material of traditional exegesis extant in the time, thus creating a standard work upon which later Qur'anic commentators drew. His is the earliest complete Qur'ān commentary to have been preserved.⁷ For our purposes, Qur'ān commentaries are especially valuable for providing the context in which the commentators were writing.

Hadīth literature is a unique body of material. Compiled in the two centuries following the death of the Prophet, it records the actions, words, and tacit approvals attributed to the Prophet. The greatest and largest number of *muṣannafs*-i.e. compilations of traditions by subject matter- and the most authoritative *ṣahīhs* and *sunan* were produced in the ninth century. Most Shi'i *hadīth* was systematized during the Buwaihid period in the tenth century. Thus, all the canonical Sunni collections date from the time of the Abbasids.

The material included in the books of tradition is very comprehensive and deals with large domains of Muslim life. According to A.J. Wensinck, "Hadīth literature is a storehouse of Muslim views about nearly all Muslim topics and as such it is a mirror of the Muslim mind."⁸ My usage of collections of *hadīth* focuses primarily on tracking the apocalyptic traditions which involve the city of Constantinople. The *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī (194-256/810-870) and The *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Abū al-Ḥusain

⁷ Helmut Gätje, *The Qur'ān and its Exegesis* (Los Angeles, 1976), p. 34.

⁸ In his "The Importance of Tradition for the Study of Islam," *Moslem World* 11(1921)*3, pp. 239-245.

Muslim(202-261/817-874), brought together everything that was recognized as genuine in the orthodox circles in the ninth century. I have also used The *Sunan* of Abu Dā'ud(203-275/817-888), the *Jāmi'* of Tirmidhi(206-279/821-892), the *Sunan* of al-Nasā'ī(d.303/915) and the *Musnad* of Ibn Ḥanbal which contains the largest number of relevant traditions.

The term 'adab encompasses various literal and metaphorical meanings. Here it is used to refer to the profane literature as distinct from 'ilm which sums up the religious sciences. It includes the "best" of what had been said in the form of verse, prose, aphorism and anecdotes on every conceivable subject which an educated man, an 'adīb, is supposed to know.⁹ It consists of a variety of topics and includes aphorisms, prose essays, snatches of verses all dealing with a wide range of problems of language, literature, and ethical and practical behavior. Adab literature "holds by far the greatest promise of serving as a source for us to get behind official attitudes and gain an insight into what real people thought and how they judged actions."¹⁰ In the works of 'adab, the Byzantines are present mostly in anecdotes whose intention is often the exaltation of

⁹See F. Gabrieli, "Adab" *Encyclopedia of Islam*(2nd edition) and Franz Rosenthal "Literature" in *Legacy of Islam*, ed. J. Schacht and C.E. Bosworth(Oxford, 1974), pp. 321-349. For a discussion of the term and concept of 'adab, see S.A.Bonebakker, "Early Arabic Literature and the Term 'adab," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 4(! 984), pp. 389-421.

¹⁰Franz Rosenthal, "Fiction and Reality: Sources for the Role of Sex in Medieval Muslim Society," In *Society and the Sexes in Medieval Islam*, Ed. Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid (6th Giorgio Della Vida Biennial Conference, May 13-15, 1977) (Malibu, Ca, 1979), pp. 2-22. Reprinted in *Muslim Intellectual and Social History*(Variorum Reprints, London, 1990)*XV.

Islam and the Caliphate and the denigration of the Byzantines and their emperors. This anecdotal literature often has a popular character. Marius Canard has posited the possibility that old stories were transported into the framework of Arab-Byzantine relations or of stories of Persian origins which were in circulation in the popular history of the Persian-Roman relations and which were subsequently reproduced by the Arabs.¹¹ Forgeries, if they are to be convincing, have to correspond to the ideas that were believed to be held by people to whom they are attributed. For purposes of cultural interpretation, all the so-called pre-Islamic texts will be assigned to the time of their actual rather than of their supposed composition since the reproduction of the events and of the ideas is the product of a specific time and age, and is reflective of the way the authors knew or understood the mentality of their forefather. These texts, then, stand as a reflection of a later mentality since the interchanges were probably composed after the rise of Islam to answer political preoccupations. They do inform us how the Arabs after Islam understood the mentality of their ancestors. The themes that were developed in the early Arabic *'adāb* literature concerning the Byzantines were repeated by writers again and again. In addition to pre-Islamic stories, the earliest notions which were furnished by ambassadors and prisoners ended up constituting a kind of Byzantine corpus which later authors, including geographers, borrowed as such.

One of the most famous prose writers, author of works of *'adab* and politico-religious polemics was al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868-9)

¹¹Marius Canard, "Quelques à cotés des relations entre Byzance et les Arabes," *Studi Orientalistici in Onore di Giorgio Levi della Vida* (Rome, 1956), vol. 1, pp. 98-119.

who was born in Baṣra around 160/776 into an obscure family of *mawāli*. I have used several of his works including *Kitāb al-Hayawān*, which is the first comprehensive study of animals in Arabic; *Kitāb al-Bayān wal Tabyīn* which is a vast compilation, an anthology of Arab eloquence; *Al-Bukhalā'*, which is an attack on avarice and *Risāla fi-al-Radd 'ala al-Naṣāra*, [Letter on Refuting the Christians]. He wrote this letter at the order of Caliph al-Mutawakkil(232-247/833-842), hence its official nature. The chief work of al-Mubarrad(210-285/826-898), *al-Kāmil fil 'Adab*, is a work of philology combining traditions of the Prophet, sayings of pious men, proverbs, poems, and historical matter. Among the works of 'adab that I have used is *al-Faraj Ba'da al-Shidda*, written by al-Tanukhī(d.385/994) who was a *qādī*, judge of Baghdad in the second half of the tenth century. *Al-Faraj* contains material in the form of anecdotes collected during evening conversations among the cultured society of the time. These anecdotes span various epochs. In his other work, *Nishwār al-Muḥāḍara wa 'Akhbār al-Mudhākara*, Tanukhī states in his preface: "These are conversations that were gathered from men in gatherings, *majālis*, of *mashāyikh*, 'ulamā', 'udabā' and *fudalā'* all of whom had learned the stories of kings, caliphs, *kuttāb*, vezirs, philosophers, ...generals, spies...peasants, beggars, craftsmen and worthy women."¹²

In addition to anecdotes, some works of 'adab contain statements about the various "civilized nations" including the Byzantines in the context of the *Shu'ubiyya* controversy. This was a literary controversy which tried to determine the whole

¹²Al-Tanukhī, *Nishwār al Muḥāḍara*, ed. 'Abbūd al-Shaljī (Beirut, 1971), Vol.1, p. 29.

cultural orientation of Muslim society. Some Shu'ubis wanted to remodel the political and social institutions of the Muslim Empire as well as the spirit of the Muslim culture on the model of Sassanian institutions and values. At the center of the debate were the Arabs and the Persians, the two major groups within Islam.¹³ The classification of nations became a most pertinent subject and the Byzantines were at times an integral part of these discussions. Through such references on the classification of nations we are able to learn about the standing of the Byzantine Empire in the eyes of the Arabs. Among these works are the *Tabaqāt al-'Ummām* of Sā'īd al-'Andalusi (d. 462/1070) which discusses the various categories of nations and the *Risāla* of Ibn Garcia and its refutations.¹⁴ In *Kitāb al-'Imtā' wal-Mu'ānasa*, Abu Hayyān al-Tawhīdī (d. 414/1023) who was a prominent 'adīb and philosopher, provides two such discussions in the sixth and fourteenth nights in the company of the Vizir Ibn Sa'dān al-'Ārid who was minister of Samṣām al-Dawla between 982-985. Tawhīdī studied in Baghdad and supported himself by working as a professional scribe. He became a courtier of the Vizir Ibn

¹³See H. Gibb, "The Social significance of Shuubiyya," *Studia Orientalia Ioanni Pedersen dicata* (Copenhagen, 1953), pp. 105-114, reprinted in *Studies on the Civilization of Islam* (Princeton, 1962), pp. 62-73; and H.T. Norris, "Shuubiyya in Arabic Literature," *Abbasid Belles-Lettres*, ed. Julian Ashtiany et al... (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 31-47.

¹⁴The *Risāla* of Ibn Garcia is the only document left of the Shuubi movement in al-'Andalus. See 'Abd al-Walīd Tāha, "al-dass al-shu'ūbī bil-'andalus wa mawqif al-'arab fī mujābahatih," *Dirāsāt 'Andalusīyya* 4 (1990), pp. 6-24. The *Risāla* and its refutations have been translated by James Monroe, *The Shu'ubiyya in al-Andalus: The Risāla of Ibn Garcia and Five Refutations* (Berkeley, 1970).

Şa'đān attending his receptions and answering his questions on the topics of philosophy, literature, philology, court and literary gossip. He then compiled forty of these sessions under the title *Kitāb al-'Imtā' wal Mu'ānasa*. The book was written down during the second period of his life extending from 363/972 until the end of the tenth century.¹⁵ *Al 'Iqd al-Farid*, another 'adab work, includes passages that refer to the various nations in the context of the speeches of Arab chieftains delegated to the Persian King. It is an encyclopedia of the knowledge that is useful to the well-informed man and classifies the notions that constitute general culture. Although its author Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, was born and died in Cordova(246-328/860-940), he did not include any traditions of Andalusian origins and instead, drew all the material from oriental sources such as al-Jāhīz and Ibn Qutaiba.

Ibn Qutaiba(213-276/828-884) was a learned conservative. His '*Uyūn al-Akhbār* [Sources of Narratives] brings information on various subjects from Islamic and pre-Islamic times.¹⁶ Another typical work of 'adab is *Laṭā'if al-Ma'ār* [Milestones of Knowledge] by Abu Mansūr al-Thā'ālibi(350-429/961-1038). *Kitāb*

¹⁵M. Berge, "Genèse et fortune du *Kitāb al-Imtā' wal Mu'ānasa*." Institut Francais de Damas:*Bulletin d'Etudes Orientales* 25(1972), pp. 97-104.

¹⁶On Ibn Qutaiba and his significance to the times he was living in, Charles Pellat has the following to say: At the beginning of the third century, 'adab, in its widest sense, was dominated by al-Jāhīz who was a Mutazilite. In the middle of that century the masses pushed the caliphs to repudiate Mutazilism and establish Orthodoxy. Since then it was no longer the theologians and "lettres,"... favorable to the pluralism of the culture who are setting the stage but rather strict Muslims like Ibn Qutaiba, a faqīh, who dominates the second half of the ninth century. Charles Pellat," les Encyclopédies dans le Monde Arabe," *Cahiers d'histoire mondiale* 9(1966), pp. 631-658.

al-’Aghānī of Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahānī(d. 356/967) is a history of all Arab poetry that had been set to music down to the author's time and includes the texts and melodies, the lives of poets and musicians, and historical traditions and anecdotes. Many encyclopedists belonged to the elite that defined itself by the capacity to write while remaining at the margin of the great literature of science, ‘ulūm. They were addressing the "public moyen" namely, travellers, merchants, functionaries and more generally, the average man.¹⁷

I have also used diplomatic documents such as the letter of the Prophet to the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius. Ibn al-Farra's *Tārīkh al-Rusul wal-Mulūk, wa man Yasluh lis safāra* written in the fourth century, deals with embassies and diplomatic relations and includes various protocols and anecdotes of the Byzantines. *Rusūm dār al-Khilāfa* [Forms of the House of the Caliphate] is a major work on the etiquette, protocol and diplomacy of the Abbasid court. It was written by Hilāl al-Šābi' during the reign of the Abbasid Caliph al-Qā'im(422-467/1031-1075).

The most important body of sources in relation to the image of the Byzantines is the geographical literature. The Arabs did not conceive of geography as a well-defined and determined body of knowledge with a specific connotation and subject-matter. Arab geographical literature was distributed over a number of disciplines and many aspects of geography were produced.¹⁸ It

¹⁷A. Miquel, "L'Inde et la Chine vues du côté de l'Islam" In *As Others See Us: Mutual Perceptions, East and West*, Ed. Bernard Lewis et al... In *Comparative Civilization Review* 13-14(1985-6), pp. 284-297.

would seem that geographical works were sometimes used for the collection of all secular knowledge that was excluded from the traditional and religious literature.¹⁹ J.H. Kramers states that the Arab geographers of the ninth and tenth centuries must be compared to the great figures of the renaissance. Socially they belonged to the flourishing cities of Damascus, Baghdad, Hamadhan, Istakhr, Balkh.²⁰ André Miquel also states that "for want of a truly popular literature, the geographers give us a reasonably good image of the mentality of the average Muslim."²¹ Outside their general geographic considerations, their first aim was to furnish a description of the Islamic Empire. Their knowledge of the Byzantine Empire and especially of Asia Minor was more detailed than their knowledge of Europe because of the numerous wars and encounters they had with the Byzantine Empire and also, I believe, because of the cultural threat that Byzantium represented. The production of general geographical works became smaller in the eleventh century. The one great geographical work of the eleventh century that I have used is *Kitāb al-Masālik wal-Mamālik* written in 1067 by Abu 'Ubaid al-Bakrī in Spain.

The geographers of the early "Iraqi" school, Ibn Khurdadhbēh ,

¹⁸ Maqbul Ahmad, "Djughrafiya," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, New Edition, pp. 575-87.

¹⁹ J.H. Kramers, "Djughrafiya," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, pp. 61-73.

²⁰ On the Arab geographers see J.H. Kramers, "La littérature géographique classique des Musulmans, *Analecta Orientalia*, vol. 1, 1954, pp. 172-204 and his "Djughrafiya," *Encyclopedia of Islam*. Also the preface of V. Barthold to Vladimir Minorski's *Hudūd al-Ālam* (London, 1937).

²¹ A. Miquel, "Constantinople, ville sans visage," *Mélanges de l'école française de Rome, moyen age et temps modernes* 96(1984)*1, pp. 398-403.

Qudāma Ibn Ja'far, Ibn Rustih and Ibn al-Faqīh have each included in their treatment of the world a chapter on the Byzantines. Ibn Khurdadhbēh (d. 300/911) was born in Khurasan and grew in Baghdad where he became Director of the Post, *ṣāḥib al-barīd*. His *al-Masālik wal Mamālik*, composed around 846 where he furnishes itineraries, i.e. the description of routes connecting provinces and towns, is the most famous in the genre. He first wrote his work in 232/846-7 in the reign of Caliph al-Wāthiq (d. 227-232/842-847) and rewrote it in 272/855-6 under al-Mu'tamid (256-279/870-892). Ibn Khurdadhbēh treats material not only confined to the Muslim world but also extends to non-Islamic regions. His work obtained wide circulation and was utilized by many scholars. Scientific zeal was not alone in inspiring him. He was a high functionary and his book was also written with political and military intentions. Ibn Rustih's *al-'A'lāq al-Nafīsa* written between 290 and 300/903-913 includes the most detailed description of Constantinople provided by the Arab authors of this period, namely that of Harūn Ibn Yahyā. Ibn al-Faqīh al-Hamadhānī's *Kitāb al-Buldān* was written around 290/903 and records long pieces of verse and various traditions and information of legendary character. Qudāma Ibn Ja'far wrote *Kitāb al-Kharāj* in the fourth century giving information on administration, road systems and fiscal revenues.

Whereas this early century geographical literature was still interested in the non-Muslim territories, the geographers of the "Balkhī" or classical school, al-İstakhri (first half of the tenth century) Ibn Hawqal and al-Maqdīsī (d. 390/1000) confined their accounts mostly to the world of Islam. Ibn Hawqal, however, in

his *Surat al-'Ard* completed in c.366/977, has an important chapter on the lands of Rum. Al-Maqdisi's comments reflect his personal attitude towards the Byzantines: He states in his *'Ahsan al-Taqāsim fi Ma'rifat al-'Aqālīm* that he has mentioned Constantinople only because there was a quarter in it for the Muslims and that the knowledge of Constantinople and the routes to it was relevant to the Muslims for military and commercial needs.

'Alī Ibn al-Husain al-Mas'ūdī (283–345/896–956) was born in Baghdad and was probably a Twelver Shiite who was influenced by Mu'tazili thinking. He is a historian, a traveller, a geographer, and a man of letters. His *al-Tanbīh wal-Ishrāf* is a condensed and comprehensive account embracing different aspects of geographical and universal history. The political history is updated up to the time of writing, that is 345/956. He used histories written by Christians for he states that he saw a Christian chronicle in Antioch and names two major works written by two contemporary Melkite priests, the Patriarch of Alexandria Sa'id Ibn al-Baṭrīq (d. 940) and the Bishop of Manbij, Maḥbūb (d. after 942). In *Murūj al-Dhahab wa Ma'ādin al-Jawhar*, the discussion of all foreign nations known to the Muslims of the tenth century comprises almost one-half of the whole work. The particular importance of Mas'ūdī stems from the fact that he is the only known Muslim author to deal systematically with Byzantine history after the rise of Islam and until his own day.²² His travels were not limited to the Muslim world and he visited the frontier region, *al-thughūr* several

²²Ahmad Shboul, *Al-Masudi and his World* (Ithaca, 1979) introduction, xxv.

times. He perceived of historiography and geography as two closely interrelated genres in Arabic literature stating in *Tanbīh* that a nation's laws will depend among other factors on the sources of economic life and the influence of neighboring nations.²³ His knowledge as well as his literary style and taste accord him an important place among men of letters.

The works of Ibn al-Faqīh, Ibn Khurdadhbēh, Qudāma and Mas'udī reflect the end of the Amorian dynasty in Byzantium. Hārūn in Ibn Rustīh's work refers to the early Macedonian dynasty. The breach in the Macedonian dynasty opened by the reigns of Nicephorus Phocas (963-969) and John Tzimisces (969-976) is the period of al-Maqdīsī and Ibn Hawqal.²⁴

Thus, the texts that will be dealt with present a broad spectrum of genres and styles and extend over a long period of time. The sources provide specific evidence on Arab attitudes towards the Byzantines through the conventions of thought and behavior attributed to them by the authors and at second hand by those involved with them as related in the sources. Of course the conventional ideology which influenced the image need not bear any close relation to reality. Themes treated in different texts have been gathered and dealt with as if constituting part of a whole image. A study of this nature must suffer from the fact that the information has arisen in a fortuitous manner and will thus offer a partial picture. However, although the same formulae, ideals, words and phrases will certainly have acquired

²³al-Masudi, *Kitāb al-Tanbīh wal 'Ishrāf*, ed. De Goeje (Leiden, 1967), p. 84.

²⁴See A. Miquel, *La Géographie Humaine du Monde Musulman Jusqu' au Milieu du 11ème Siècle* (Paris, La Haye, 1967-80), Vol. 2, pp. 386-7.

new meanings in direct relation to the prevalent historical and cultural context as society developed, the convention as a whole remained the same and it is towards this convention that our eyes are fixated. The fact that different sources may include the same statement or account is partly due to a reliance on a same older source. In this case, the goal has been reached since the point is to investigate widespread convictions and beliefs. In other instances I had to be satisfied with a single account and the main problem in this approach was then the reliability of one report for reaching a generalization about the Byzantines.

While the Arabic texts do not permit the writing of the history of Arab-Byzantine relations, they do make it possible to uncover the mentality of the Arabs vis-à-vis the Byzantines. The ideology expressed in the sources is representative to a certain extent of the general view: they speak in part for the opinions, expectations and conventional attitudes of the Muslim Arabs. Given this focus, the historicity of the specific events related in the texts loses its importance. What we are concerned with here is not what was true; it is with what the Muslims wrote and what their audiences believed to be true. This approach is in no way superfluous because, in the end, actions are more often than not based on such beliefs. It remains, however, necessary to refer to historical reality in order to appreciate the distance between the two.

A word of caution is necessary considering the extent and variation of the sources that are used in order to get a basic idea of the image of the Byzantines among the Arabs. Information can be found everywhere and unevenness of coverage is guaranteed. The danger of overlooking some information or of attaching too

much importance to some other is everpresent.

The primary source for tracing the Arab Muslims' view of the Byzantines is the body of literature which was written mostly for a literate and therefore an audience of the elite. The question that needs to be addressed immediately is the extent to which this literature reflects the general view of the people. Was it an elitist view? If so, to what extent did it reflect the general popular feeling? The audience that an author is addressing and its expectation affects naturally the content and tone of the work and this awareness affects the author's own perception and influences him to select certain kinds of information and to stress certain aspects that find resonance in his culture and audience. Although a few authors like the geographer al-Maqdisi declare that "I am writing for the administrator, the great merchant, *tājir*, and whoever is keen on learning,"²⁵ the differentiation between the attitude of the educated and the non-educated, in addition to the socio-economic distinction, is guaranteed. However, while it is unwise to extrapolate from the elite to the masses, in the case of the Arabs, the writers themselves often did not belong to the upper class. Mohamed Arkoun states that one cannot talk about a homogeneous class united in the same needs and having a common ideology because the means of acquiring knowledge allowed the most humble to accede to a certain cultural level.²⁶ In the ninth and tenth centuries the secretaries, *kuttāb*, were recruited from middle class families, mercantile

²⁵al-Maqdisi, *Aḥsan al-Taqāṣīm fi Ma'arifat al-Aqālīm*, ed. De Goeje (Leiden, 1967), p. 5. A partial translation by André Miquel, *La Meilleure Repartition pour la Connaissance des Provinces* (Damascus, 1963).

²⁶M. Arkoun, *La Pensée Arabe* (Paris, 1979), p. 50.

and other urban elements and belonged to various confessions. They had little in common save their bureaucratic work and their social standing. The other type of men of letters were members of the independent middle class. The art of writing, not of reading, which was much more widespread, was the distinctive mark of the middle class and of governmental circles.²⁷ The 'ulama came from a variegated background: they derived from all the strata of Muslim society, including the lowest such as servants and porters; the majority, however, were merchants and craftsmen.²⁸ The early culture thus had a relatively wide social basis and was to some extent in contact with day to day reality.²⁹ However, such an administrative cultural elite was not only city-based but also cosmopolitan in outlook.³⁰ We are, therefore, unable to know the perception of the peasants and the bedouins. The geographical location of the author is also important as it influences the selection of his subject and his approach. An author living in an area geographically close to the Byzantine Empire has a sense of urgency than someone living in Transoxania or in the Maghrib

²⁷S.D. Goitein, "The Mentality of the Middle Class in Medieval Islam," *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions* (Leiden, 1966), pp. 242-254.

²⁸Hayyim Cohen, "The Economic Background and Secular Occupation of Muslim Jurisprudents and Traditionalists in the Classical Period of Islam," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 13(1970), pp. 16-61.

²⁹Claude Cahen, "Les facteurs économiques et sociaux dans l'ankylose culturelle de l'Islam," *Classicisme et declin culturel dans l'histoire de l'Islam*. Eds. R. Brunschwig and G. E. Grunebaum (Paris, 1955), pp.195-207.

³⁰Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*(Chicago, 1974), Vol.1, p. 444.

lacks. In addition, the discourse is male; the female voice is totally absent. Thus, although the material is abundant and varied, it is limited both spatially and socially. Again, how representative? there is no claim here at an exclusive depiction of the reality of the Byzantines' image. This is merely a tentative effort to understand the complexity of that reality.

One of the most important methodological preoccupations is, therefore, that of knowing to what extent our authors reflect the general mentality: how representative of the totality of society were the opinions expressed by intellectuals.³¹ Does an image constitute the expression of profound attitudes of individuals or does it adhere to clichés imposed by the social consensus? More problematic is the evaluation of the influence exercised by these attitudes on the political and military developments.³² Most often the authors had no direct experience which complicates the problem of representation further. Writers, however, draw their material from life itself and therefore whether one regards the content as the reflection of reality or as a tool with which to shape it, its relevance to life is inherent in its very nature. On the other hand, medieval authors, in general, revealed the tendency to see their neighbors in the social relations or psychological characteristics typical of themselves. Arab writers,

³¹ Franz Rosenthal addresses the same problem in the "Forward" to his *Sweeter than Hope: Complaint and Hope in Medieval Islam* (Leiden, 1983): In default of a simple solution to this problem he concludes: "The assumption must suffice that in the realm of intellectual speculation existence equals expression and vice versa. Unless the indiosyncratic character of a given view can be proved, it has to be representative of society as a whole."

³² E. Sivan, *L'Islam et la Croisade* (Paris, 1968), p. 6.

like any other writer, approached their subjects from the angle of certain ideas and from that angle presented their version of reality. The examination of their works and the emergence of the portrayal of the Byzantines therefrom throws light on one facet of the complex relationship between the Arabs and the Byzantines.

In spite of all of all these reservations, the Arabic texts still have an incomparable value as testimonies of their society's ideas about Byzantium, of the place of the Byzantines in the "imaginaire collectif." The image of Byzantium that the average person had, was, most probably, more vague and more fabulous than the one we can extract from the sources. Therefore, on some level at least, the views of the authors are not an exaggeration of the average attitude. It is, however, also essential to keep in mind the possibilities and the potentials that these same authors had in helping shape the image that the public developed with respect to the Byzantines.

The organization of the thesis is thematic. The fact that my treatment of the material is thematic rather than chronological requires a chapter that deals, in a condensed way, with the historical background of the Arab-Byzantine relations so that events dealt with in the later topical sections can fall into some chronological order. The main topics around which the material is gathered are the following: Chapter two deals with the Byzantines as a people, and includes general stereotypes concerning the character and the social behavior of the Byzantines, an analysis of the various names by which the Byzantines are referred to, and an assessment of their scientific knowledge and of their

technical skills. Chapter three focuses on the image of the Byzantine emperors in the Arabic sources and the changes it underwent. Chapter four deals with Byzantine ceremonial and the authors' understanding of its importance. Chapter five deals with the Byzantine lands and emphasizes the centrality of the city of Constantinople and treats both the symbolic importance of the capital of the Byzantines in Muslim eyes and the physical descriptions of the city. I try to trace developments within each topic by looking at how various authors belonging to different epochs and to various parts of the Islamic world dealt with them and to see whether the image that the Arab authors had of Byzantium was monolithic or whether it developed in conjunction with the new political realities. Although my primary concern is with attitudes and opinions, the factual data is by no means rejected as the way the authors select and treat the data is a valuable indication of their attitudes.³³ Nevertheless, again, the focus is not on historical reality as it unfolds ; it is on the perceptions of the Byzantines by the Arabs. These perceptions constitute an example of the fundamental problem of how one group of people "invents its Other."³⁴

My theme, the image of the Other, touches above all the history of mentalités. The thesis constitutes a glimpse of the reflection of Man, the Muslim, in the mirror of the Other, the

³³In *Towards a Theory of Historical Narrative: A Case Study in Perso-Islamicate Historiography*(Ohio, 1980), Marylin R. Waldman has examined the bearing of Baihaqi's life on his historical work, written in Persian (1056-1059), and on how his position as secretary and his membership in the cultural class influenced his choice of data and the way he organized his work.

³⁴Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978).

Byzantine. The image that Man makes of others and that which he presents of himself, the attempts at mutual understanding, their successes and failures are crucially important for individuals and societies. Mental forces can sometimes weigh more than economic and political influences.

The "Other" is an extremely complex notion. There is a distinction between the Other accepted as a partner and the Other rejected as inferior and incompatible.³⁵ Sometimes he is considered as similar and he can thus be accepted and integrated, once modified. Sometimes he is a stranger who must be rejected. In the end, the Other represents viable but alternative ways of thinking and acting. Francois Hartog describes the inherent complexity by saying: "Dire l'autre, c'est le poser comme différent, c'est poser qu'il y à deux termes, a et b et que a n'est pas b; soit il existe des Grecs et des non-Grecs. Mais la différence ne devient intéressante qu' à partir du moment où a et b entrent dans le même système. Dès lors que la différence est dite ou transcrise elle devient significative puisqu'elle est prise dans le système de la langue et de l'écriture. Commence alors ce travail incessant et indefini qui consiste à ramener l'autre au même. Il y a le monde où l'on raconte et le monde que l'on raconte; comment, de manière persuasive, inscrire le monde que l'on raconte dans le monde où l'on raconte: tel est le problème du narrateur. Il est confronté a un problème de traduction."³⁶

An image exists on several levels and in various types. The

³⁵Yves Albert Dauge talks about *l'alterité* ,which is positive, and *l'alienité* ,which is negative. *Le barbare: recherches sur la conception romaine de la barbarie et de la civilisation*(Bruxelles,1981), p. 395.

³⁶Francois Hartog, *Le miroir d'Hérodote*, essai sur la representation de l'autre (Paris, 1980), p. 224.

process that creates it is the way in which a certain people see others and the actions they do when in contact with them. The perception which is constituted by images, representations, ideas, judgements, prejudices, and emotions, eventually lead to a certain behavior. In trying to understand the image of Byzantium by the Arabs, I attempt to understand part of the perception which led to certain reactions. The Byzantines themselves have their image of who the Muslims are and have their own attitude which the Muslims can sense or imagine rather than know. The Muslim writers show concern and interest in this image and mention in several passages their understanding of it. The point is not to evaluate the descriptions or to gauge the information, but rather to scrutinize the way in which the description is done and to analyze the treatment of the information. This is crucial to uncover since the attitude of the Byzantines forms to a great extent the Muslim response to them and the creation of a certain image of Byzantium. Hence the complexity: the vision of the Other, the Byzantine, is the vision of one's self, the Arab Muslim. In fact it may be a kind of mirror image of himself and thus the need to postulate the other in order to define and legitimate what one is to oneself. This leads naturally to a series of comparisons and to a mixture of superiority/inferiority feelings.

Thus, the image of oneself and that which is made of the adversary are the two faces of one coin. In many ways the self-definition of the Arabs is implicitly connected to their way of relating to the Byzantines and the Byzantines' own self-definition. In numerous instances the Byzantine is a foil for the emotional/psychological trials of the Arabs. To say the "Other" is

a way of talking about "Us". The polarity Us/Them contributes towards a better understanding of the "Us". Such a delineation, through a set of contrasts, is dependent upon the Muslim image of themselves. This means that all perception is made through the lenses of one's own system of values and beliefs. To talk about the other is also to presuppose, in this case, that the Muslims occupy a central position. And, indeed, in the world picture of the Muslim scholars of the Middle Ages, at the center stood the realm of Islam. The image of the Byzantines, therefore cannot be dissociated from the image that the Muslim Arab authors construct of the Muslims. The two terms Byzantine and Muslim are often found in a relation of opposition. It is only in its ideological space of political-confessional confrontation that the "rationality" of these judgements can be captured. A culture that differs is thus perceived as a negation of that set of values rather than an expression of another different system. The literature is thus bound to be unrealistic in its omissions and misrepresentations.³⁷

One purpose that this "alterité" serves is the intensification of hostility and violence, rendering it more legitimate by "de-inviduating" the enemy. Delegitimization which categorizes groups into extreme negative categories through dehumanization, attribution of negative and unacceptable personality traits, and its

³⁷An analysis of a similar pattern in the modern period is the perception of Africa by the British. See Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow, *The Myth of Africa* (New York, 1977). See also Tzvetan Todorov, *La conquête de l'Amérique: la question de l'autre* (Paris, 1982). See also Robert Browning, "Greeks and Others from Antiquity to the Renaissance," In *History, Language and Literacy in the Byzantine World* (Variorum reprints, London, 1989) pp.1-26 (1st publication).

presentation as a threat to the basic values of the delegitimizing society, is the extreme case of stereotyping and prejudice. Groups in conflict need delegitimization in order to explain and maintain the conflict. The greater the danger of open boundaries as a consequence of geographical proximity, political conditions and cultural similarity, the stronger the need to draw differentiating boundaries.³⁸ This was to some the extent the case in the relations between the Byzantines and the Arabs. Differences are exaggerated and projections of strange behavior abound. What is important is the limited vocabulary and imagery that impose themselves as a consequence.

In our texts we find two attitudes: the first is a view that sees the Byzantines as identical human beings, equal to the Muslims on many levels, and sometimes even superior. This was the attitude in the early period and it explains the attempt at bringing the Byzantines into Islam as witnessed in the letter of the Prophet to Heraclius. The second attitude developed with time as the Muslims gained in strength and knowledge and founded a great cultural center of their own, namely Baghdad. With that came a high level of confidence and the differences between the Arabs and the Byzantines were translated in terms of superiority and inferiority, although this did not include all aspects of Byzantine civilization. This attitude persisted even after the victories of the emperors of the Macedonian dynasty over the Arab armies in the tenth and eleven centuries. However, by that time the superiority was a cultural one and was unaffected by actual events and

³⁸Daniel Bar-Tal, "Delegitimization: the Extreme Case of Stereotyping and Prejudice," in *Stereotyping and Prejudice: Changing Conceptions* (New York, 1989), pp.169-182.

circumstances. Although prejudices of this type rooted as they are in political and cultural backgrounds are subject to change, yet, when conditions remain static for a relatively long period, images achieve a certain autonomy and begin to be regarded as mirrors of historical reality.

I am dealing with samples, with mostly minor events. I am not giving a view of the politics of a certain emperor but rather a partial glance at a campaign, a reception grasped in a particular way, through an episode illustrating the observation. The Muslim Arabs did not develop a monolithic approach towards the Byzantines. They developed their images depending on regional political realities and reflecting the personal, cultural and contextual circumstances in which each writer was found. They judged themselves with reference to others as well as according to their own ideal. In a number of profound ways, the self-definition of the Muslim Arab is implicitly connected with his way of relating to the Byzantine and to the Byzantines' self-definition. This investigation thus helps us to learn about the Arabs' view of the world, morality and ideal behavior.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A CHRONICLE OF WARFARE

The medieval histories and chronicles concentrated quasi-exclusively on information pertaining to military and political affairs. The Muslim chronicler, al-Tabari (d. 310/923) lists at the end of each year the raids carried out by the Muslims into Byzantine territory. This preoccupation on the outcome of warfare between the two empires gave a distorted overall picture of Byzantine-Muslim relations. However, these sources, although narrowly focused, reflect, nevertheless, a reality of the times, that of incessant warfare.

The first major encounter between the expanding Muslim armies and the Byzantines was at Yarmük in 636.³⁹ During the following decades several attempts were made to conquer Constantinople. Sieges were laid and naval and land forces were sent. The last siege of Constantinople took place in 717.

Under the late Umayyads and the early Abbasids, the frontier

³⁹The earlier confrontations of Mu'ta and Tabuk were not with the Byzantines proper but with their Arab clients on the borders.

line between Arabs and Byzantines was formed by the great ranges of the Taurus and anti-Taurus. Here, a line of fortresses, *al-thughūr*, stretched from Malatiyah, on the Upper Euphrates, to Tarsus, near the Mediterranean coast, marking and guarding the frontier. The line of fortresses was divided into two groups: in the North-East, *thughūr al-Jazīra*, and in the South-West, *thughūr al-Shām*.

Almost yearly, the Arabs made incursions into Asia Minor. The practice of making two or three expeditions a year became so established in the ninth century that officials soon laid down a schedule for these operations. Activities became by then confined to holding the line of the Taurus with occasional expeditions to secure zones for attacking or harassing the Byzantines on the other side. At times, they garrisoned and occupied fortresses and towns in Anatolia but beyond such temporary occupation, the Arabs made no permanent conquests. Warfare between Byzantium and the Muslim world consisted mostly of raids broken, occasionally, by dispatches of envoys and truces for the exchange of prisoners. This vital struggle was an integral part of both Muslim and Byzantine policy.

Economically, these invasions resulted in a diminution in agricultural, commercial and industrial activity. Demographic changes took place as a result of the massive displacement of population. The chronicles paint a picture of devastation and abandonment of the more exposed settlements in favor of the less accessible sites. Life in the areas which were regularly

plundered meant yearly raids, constant insecurity and frequent flights.

The disruption of the life in the frontier areas is expressed in a letter that Caliph Ḥarūn al-Rashīd(170-193/786-809) sent to Emperor Constantine VI(780-797) in which he described to him the disadvantages under which the people of different classes suffer as a result of the resumption of fighting: "The Byzantine generals who today are awaiting armies from every pass, the agriculturalists and proprietors who today are prevented from cultivating their lands; the merchant class whose members are no longer able to trade with Muslims as formerly and have lost their profits; the clergy who now have to urge their flocks to fight their fear and oppose the pacific command of Christ about turning the other cheek; and the country people who instead of enjoying security and leisure are faced with the prospect of seeing their wives and children captive, their flocks and herds destroyed, their trees and produce ruined and their homes abandoned."⁴⁰

The fall of the Umayyad dynasty and the rise of the Abbasids in 750 created a new situation: the years between 756 and 863 represent one of the most successful periods of Muslim activity in the East. The period between 809-842 witnessed almost continuous warfare between the two empires. In 827 Byzantium lost Crete. The reign of Emperor Theophilus(829-42) was taken up with continuous warfare with Caliph al-Ma'mūn(198-218/813-

⁴⁰ For the text of the letter see Ahmad Farīd al-Rifā'i, 'Asr al-Ma'mūn(Cairo, 1927), Appendix II, pp.188-236.

833). Theophilus had potential support in the Persian Khurramites who with the Kurd Nasr crossed into Byzantine territory after their defeat in 833-834.⁴¹ In 837 at the instigation of Babak, Theophilus destroyed Zibatra and this made a great impression on Caliph al-Mu'tasim (218-227/833-842) who launched a counter-attack and captured Amorium, an event which resonated in Arabic poetry. Between 809-842, although they had scored some notable successes, the Arabs had achieved no long term strategic results. Moreover they were becoming weaker and this allowed the Byzantines to strengthen their own position in the succeeding period. After 842 Islamic imperial ambitions evaporated; all that remained was a policy of defense to keep the Byzantine border weak and protect the Euphrates-Mediterranean commercial route.⁴²

With the Byzantine victory of 863 under Michael III (842-867) came a turning point in the struggle between the Byzantines and the Arabs. Byzantium had regained the upper hand: the turning point in the struggle had been reached. For more than two centuries, the Byzantines were on the defensive while the Arabs were launching ceaseless raids. From the year 900 on, the Byzantines were able to make a series of successful campaigns.

⁴¹The Khurramites came into prominence after the execution of the leader of the Abbasid revolt Abu Muslim in 136 H. They are heard of again in the age of al-Ma'mūn when Babak rebelled against the government but to be defeated under Caliph al-Mu'tasim. *Encyclopedia of Islam*, first edition, pp. 974-75.

⁴²P. Von Sivers, "Taxes and Trade in the Abbasid thughur, 750-962" *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. 25, #1.

In 904 Thessalonica was sacked by the Arabs. The capture of Melitene marked a decisive stage in the advance of Byzantium. It was now the turn of the Arab lands to suffer repeated incursions accompanied by looting and devastation. Between 934 and 955 there was a Muslim recovery and the Byzantines were forced to slacken their offensive. In 944 the Byzantines besieging Edessa were rewarded by the surrender of the "mandylion." From 946, Saif al-Dawla's energies were henceforth devoted to the struggle with Byzantium, at this time ruled by Bardas Phocas and his sons. The war was at first local, confined to the region of Mar'ash-Hadath, but it soon spread over the entire front.

The period from 955 to 1001 was the most brilliant in the history of the Macedonian dynasty. The years 955 to 969 cover the conquests of Nicephorus Phocas and the treaty establishing a protectorate over the Amirate of Aleppo. In 961 Nicephorus Phocas took Chandax by storm. In 962 he plundered Aleppo. In 965 the Byzantine fleet achieved the final conquest of Cyprus and defeated the Egyptian fleet. In 969-70 the chamberlain of Aleppo, signed a treaty by which the Amirate in fact became a Byzantine protectorate. Such a treaty was an unprecedented humiliation to Islam. From 970 to 976 John Tzimisces was extending his campaigns into the heart of Mesopotamia and Syria. The southward extension of the Byzantine frontier in Syria now brought the Empire into contacts with the Fatimids. Between 976 and 1001 Basil II defended both his own conquests and the amirate of Aleppo against the designs of the Fatimids. The latter part of

the reign of Basil II and the reigns of the last emperors of the Macedonian dynasty (1025-56) were marked in the East by operations on a small scale.⁴³ This record of continuous battle highlighted the permanent antagonism between the two.

POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND AND SOCIO-CULTURAL RELATIONS

The geographical and cultural proximity of the two rivals must always be borne in mind when dealing with the relations between the two traditions. For there was as well, of course, a more humane side to the relations between Arabs and Byzantines. Indeed, the permanent state of war did not prevent the existence of peaceful relations and of commercial and cultural exchange. Contacts arose in a variety of circumstances: through commercial relations, through the exchange of embassies; through the internment of prisoners of war on both sides; through the deportation of the populations of captured cities; through the movements of traitors and exiles from both camps; through the attendance at councils by the oriental patriarchs or their delegates and the visits to the Eastern patriarchates made by the envoys of the patriarch of Constantinople; through the conclusion of truces, through the pilgrimages to the Holy Land, through Byzantine women who filled the harems and through the ransoming of prisoners. In fact, the exchange of prisoners gradually became so regularized that it came to have its own

⁴³"Byzantium and the Muslim World to the Middle of the Eleventh Century," *The Cambridge Medieval History*, Vol.4, part 1, pp. 696-735.

protocols. The treatment of prisoners reveals a feeling of mutual respect and the repeated exchange must have had a humanizing effect on the relations between the two rivals, creating opportunities for friendly meetings. More important was the impact of the existence of large numbers of prisoners among the population, working and interacting with it, with a resulting exchange of ideas. One sign that relations between the frontier societies were maintained was the frequent passage that occurred from one frontier to the other of individuals or groups. One spectacular case of desertion and conversion was that of the tribe of Banū Habib, whose members chose to migrate in 935 from Mesopotamia to Byzantine territory and convert to Christianity, following a conflict with the Ḥamdānid 'Amir Nāṣir al-Dawlah(d.358/969). In addition, some Byzantine emperors such as Leo VI(886-912) and Alexander(912-13) had Muslim councilors just as Muslim caliphs used Christian and, sometimes, Byzantine civil servants and councillors.

Cultural and political frontiers seldom if ever coincided. New ideas, manners and customs languages and literatures were exchanged between the two rivals. The result of this interpenetration was not only the diffusion of military techniques, material goods and methods of economic production but also the diffusion of political ideas and institutions as well as more general cultural aspects.⁴⁴

⁴⁴D. Obolensky, "Byzantine Frontier Zones and Cultural Exchanges," *Actes du XIVème Congrès International des Etudes Byzantines* (Sept., 1971), pp. 303-313.

The frontier was a barrier but also a region of contact: two human groupings, fluid and moving gradually stabilize themselves and settle.⁴⁵ If, according to Muslim law, there existed a permanent state of war, there was nothing to prevent peaceful interchanges during periods of truce. A citizen of Byzantium could even get permission to take up residence in Muslim territory and engage in commerce. The Byzantine Empire was perhaps less liberal in these matters than the Arabs. However, in the tenth century there were Muslims established at Trebizon, in some towns in Bithynia and at Constantinople.

The uninterrupted conflict between the Byzantines and the Arabs and the persistence of these meetings provoking communication, even when involuntary, influenced the internal development of the two Empires. Byzantium expressed sympathy towards the Arabs of the Orient, infidels, but courteous and civilized. Patriarch Nicholas Mysticus (901-7 and 911-925), the powerful patriarch of Constantinople and at one point the regent of the Byzantine empire, wrote that "two lordships rule the world, the Roman-Christian and the Islamic."⁴⁶ One sign pointing to the differential treatment is obvious in the fact that the inhabitants of Constantinople who could not endure a Latin church within their walls, tolerated a mosque.⁴⁷ The opposition

⁴⁵J. Gautier Dalché, "Islam et Chretienté en Espagne au XIIème siècle: contribution à l'étude de la notion de frontière." *Hesperis* 46 (1959), pp. 183-217.

⁴⁶R. Jenkins and L. Westernink, *Nicholas I, Patriarch of Constantinople: Letters* (Washington, 1973), p. 3.

⁴⁷In Alfred Rambaud, *L'empire Grec au Xème siècle: Constantin Porphyrogenète* (Paris, 1970), pp. 433-5.

of the Muslims and Christians, born from the difference of religions, the languages, the institutions, the morality and habits marked the zone where these oppositions reveal themselves the most manifestly and frequently. The frontier separated two powers rivaling in exercising the dominum mundi, each possessing the necessary political, social, economic and intellectual structures.⁴⁸ This frontier separated two civilizations, each carrying a different message, each aspiring at imposing its will on the other.

A reflection of the continuous contact is the fact that certain words in Arabic acquired a special meaning resulting from the interaction with the Byzantines. The *Qasīda Sasāniyya* written in the second half of the tenth century, deals with the Islamic underworld jargon. The body of the poem comprises a catalogue of the different types of beggars and their activities. In the *Qasīda Sasāniyya* the term *makhtara* is glossed as the art of swallowing one's tongue and then indicating that the Byzantines have cut it out. The *maisarānī* is "the one who asserts that he is a refugee from the Byzantine frontier zone and who alleges that his tongue has been cut out by the Greeks and then gives the summonses to armies on the frontier." The term *maṣtab* also occurs in the poem and its definition is "the one who goes around begging on the pretext of getting money to ransom his family left

⁴⁸Helène Ahrweiler, "La frontière et les frontières de Byzance en Orient," *Byzance: les Pays et les Territoires* (Variorum, London, 1976).

behind in the hands of the Byzantines.⁴⁹

We also encounter the Byzantines also in the genre of the *Maqāmāt*. The hero of the *Maqāmāt* of Badi' al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī, Abu al-Faṭḥ al-‘Iskandarī poses sometimes as a refugee from the lands newly occupied by the Byzantines. This reference clearly reflects a period, the tenth century, when the Byzantines had taken the offensive leading to an influx of Muslim refugees from the frontiers. This long conflict that went uninterrupted from the end of the seventh century to the end of the tenth brought to life a particular epic in prose, the *Life of al-‘Amīra Dhāt al-Himma* which reconstructs, in a legendary way, various episodes of the long war.⁵⁰

The early Umayyad period was an example of co-existence and at first, the Arabs borrowed abundantly from Byzantine institutions. Indeed, the first period was that of the greatest Byzantine influence on the developing Islamic civilization. Byzantine influence in the realm of administrative and economic life was reflected in the retention of the Byzantine civil service, the use of Byzantine administrative, legal, numismatic traditions and language. With the later Umayyads begins the process of ascertaining the Arabs' own identity. They slowly built up the administrative machinery of their state although the

⁴⁹ C.E. Bosworth, *The Medieval Islamic Underworld: the Banū Sasan in Arabic society and Literature*, (Leiden, 1976), vol. 2, p.8, verses 37 and 45.

⁵⁰ Marius Canard, "Delhemma, Epopée Arabe des Guerres Arabo-Byzantines," *Byzantion* X (1935), pp. 283-300. The epic's date of composition falls outside of our time frame.

substructure of the Islamic state remained for a long time Byzantine.⁵¹ Also, Byzantine influence on Arab political practice was obvious. Greek remained the language of the state registers and the Byzantine standards of weight and measures survived.⁵² Arabization reforms started under the Umayyad Caliph 'Abd al-Malik (65–86/685–705) partly, because, according to al-Balādhuri, the Byzantines, who had been the suppliers of gold coins to the Arabs threatened to use some insulting inscription associated with the Prophet Muhammad. The Caliph reacted by initiating the minting of his own Arabic coins.⁵³ This tradition attests to the crucial motive behind the project of Arabization: its symbolic significance. It stemmed from the religio-ideological struggle with a rival empire. During the Abbasid period, Persian influences gained ascendancy while at the same time, Greek cultural heritage entered the mainstream of Islamic civilization.

⁵¹A distinction must always be borne in mind between the eastern and western lands of the Islamic Caliphate where the Sassanian and Byzantine administrative practices had their respective influences.

⁵²See Daniel Sahas, "The Art and non-Art of Byzantine Polemics: Patterns of Refutation in Byzantine Anti-Islamic Literature," In *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands, Eight to Eighteenth Centuries*, and S. Vryonis, "Byzantium and Islam Seven to Seventeenth Centuries," In *East European Quarterly* II no.3(1968), p.205. Reprinted in *Byzantium, Its Internal History and Relations with the Muslim World*(London, Variorum Reprints), no. IX. Lopez states that the new laws of Emperor Heraclius were not without echoes in the legal courts of the early caliphate. In "Byzantine Law in the Seventh Century and its Perception by the Germans and Arabs" *Byzantion* 16(1942–3), pp.445–461.

⁵³Al Balādhuri, *Futuḥ al-Buldān*(Beirut, 1958), pp. 335–336.

From the beginning, Byzantium was reduced to the image of the state. The first skirmishes between Islam and Byzantium, the attempts against Constantinople, the establishment of the frontiers fixed Byzantium as the primary enemy. In an answer to a threatening Byzantine poem, the Arab poet writing on behalf of the Caliph confirmed the military operations between the two empires: "For three hundred consecutive years we have been reaping your heads with pickaxes."⁵⁴ The conflict between them directed the orientation of the sources and in many instances warfare held a predominant place in the major chronicles and historical works. It is essential to keep the perpetual warfare in mind together with the Byzantine legacy which affected Islam in the practical and secular sciences, in dogma, theology and mysticism, while discussing the different aspects of the Arabs' image of the Byzantines.

⁵⁴The poem of Ibn al-Qaffāl to Nicephorus. *Tabaqāt al-Shāfiyya*, Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, vol.2, pp.179-181.

THE BYZANTINES: *AL-RŪM*

For the Arabs, the Byzantines constituted a vivid "Other" providing a convenient foil for self-definition. The Rum were the enemy par excellence and so Qudāma Ibn Ja'far stated that "the Muslims should be most cautious with the Rum."⁵⁵ There was also a cultural dimension. In *al-Tanbīh wal-Ishrāf*, Mas'ūdī explains that he confined his treatment of non-Muslim peoples to the kingdom of the Persians, the Ancient Greeks and the Rum on cultural grounds; "the two kingdoms of Ancient Greece and Rum came next to Persia in greatness and glory; moreover they were gifted in the various branches of philosophy and sciences and admirable craftsmanship."⁵⁶ In addition, unlike Ancient Greece and Persia, the Empire of Rum is still in possession of firmly established institutions and a highly organized administration.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Qudāma Ibn Ja'far, *Kitāb al-Kharāj*, Ed. De Goeje (Leiden, 1967), p. 252.

⁵⁶ Mas'ūdī, *al-Tanbīh wal 'Ishrāf* (Maktabat al-Hilāl, Beirut, 1981), p. 21.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

THE SELF-IMAGE OF THE BYZANTINES

In order to appreciate the image that the Arabs had of the Byzantines, it is important to understand the image of themselves that the Byzantines cherished and projected. To the Byzantines, their Empire was none other than the Roman empire, perfected through Christianity. They admitted no distinction or discontinuity from antiquity.⁵⁸ Their political ideology proclaimed the Empire's universal character founded as it was on the Roman heritage and consolidated by the ecumenical Christian ideology.⁵⁹ The idea that there may be only one single legitimate empire is the basic principle of Byzantine political doctrines.

Of course, this ideology was not expressed in exactly the same key throughout the thousand years of Byzantine history, but took on different colors and textures depending on the political circumstances of a given era. During the iconoclastic period, for example, the Byzantine ideal stressed national solidarity to the point of pulling away from the Greaco-Roman tradition. From the mid-tenth to the mid-eleventh centuries as the Empire reached its apogee, the Byzantines attached themselves to a Hellenic past as a way of affirming their cultural superiority

⁵⁸According to A.P. Kazhdan, "The Byzantines believed themselves to be Romans, considered themselves to be the direct descendants of antiquity and the heirs of the ancient language, law and terminology." *People and Power in Byzantium* (Washington, 1982), pp.120-1.

⁵⁹ For the political ideology of the Byzantine Empire, see Hélène Ahrweiler, *L'Ideologie Politique de l'Empire Byzantin* (Paris, 1975).

over the rest of the world.⁶⁰

THE PRESTIGE OF THE BYZANTINES AMONG THE MUSLIMS

By and large the Muslim observers believed in this projected, larger than life image. They viewed the history of the Byzantines as an extension of that of Ancient Greece and of the Roman Empire and this is the reason behind the mingling and even confusion of the names that the Arab authors apply to the Byzantines.

The Byzantine Empire had significant real and symbolic importance for the Arabs. This is attested by the meticulous fashion in which Arab historians record every single expedition against the Byzantines by the Arabs. The *Sā'ifa*, that is the summer raid, was mentioned alongside the *hajj* caravan to Mecca. Muslim rulers were accorded as much prestige for leading an expedition against Byzantine territories as they were for leading a successful pilgrimage to Mecca. Their legitimacy owed as much to their support of both of the two endeavors and failure to do so might menace their position to an equal degree. It is thus that we find Caliph Harūn al-Rashīd directing operations in the year 190, and wearing a *qalansūwa* bearing the inscription *hajjun ghāzī*.⁶¹ The caliphs personal involvement in the *Jihād* against the Byzantines reflected a high degree of prestige and that partly explains the continuous Muslim raids on Byzantine

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 62.

⁶¹al-Ṭabarī, *Tārikh al-Rusul wal Mūlūk*, Eds. S Guyard and M.J. De Goeje (Leiden, 1879-1901/reprinted in 1967), Tertia series , Vol. 2, p. 709.

territories at a time when conquest ceased to be the goal of the campaigns as there were no longer attempts to occupy Byzantine territory. The ideological motivation is clear since the expeditions were very expensive and the war ravaged frontier provinces could not have provided an enticing booty.⁶² This ostentatious practice of both pilgrimage and *jihād* was propaganda for internal consumption.⁶³

⁶²J.f. Haldon and H. Kennedy, "Arab-Byzantine Frontier in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries: Military Organization and Society in the Borderlands." *Academie Serbe des Sciences et des Arts, Recueil des Travaux de l'Institut d'Etudes Byzantines* XIX(1980), pp.79-116.

⁶³ In A.R.Salem, *War and Peace in the Caliphate and Empire: Political Relations between the Arabs and the Byzantines*(749-847), Ph.d., University of Birmingham, 1983, pp.121-3. This was the case in much later times. According to Karl Barbir, *Ottoman Rule in Damascus, 1708-1758*(Princeton, 1980), p.109, the *hajj* was referred to as "the most important of the exalted state's affair" in Ottoman correspondence. The Ottoman sultan's prestige and legitimacy rested in part on his ability to organize and ease the pilgrims' journey within his Empire. King Husain of the Hijaz organized in 1925 a disastrous *hajj* which was considered to be a scandal and was one of the direct causes of his fall. See Mary Wilson, *King Abdullah, Britain and the Making of Jordan* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 87.

The Imami view-point was different in that *jihād* against the enemies within the Islamic world, *al-bughāt*, takes precedence over *jihād* against outside forces. Following Karbala', *jihād* against Muslim enemies was considered to be in abeyance until the arrival of the *mahdi*. No *shī'i* may participate in an offensive *jihād* against the infidel; his only duty is to defend the borders, *ribāt*. See E.Kohlberg, "Some Imami Shī'i Interpretations of Umayyad History," in *Studies On the First century of Islamic Society*, ed. G.H.A.Juyboll, (Illinois, 1982), pp.145-159.

The Byzantine frontier thus played a very special part in the life of the Muslim State. The centrality of the concept of *Jihād* was asserting itself in every instance. The situation differed in the Byzantine case due to the absence of the idea of holy war. Since the Byzantine empire offered a rival ideology and a rival political system, the Muslim rulers used aspects of their relationship to enhance their prestige in their internal political and ideological struggles.⁶⁴

The prestige of the Byzantine empire and Constantinople remained so great that the Abbasid and Fatimid Caliphs competed to have their names mentioned in the prayers at the mosque in Constantinople. Following his defeat on the Bulgar front, Emperor Basil II (976–1025) was obliged to sign a treatise with the Fatimid Caliph al-‘Azīz (365–386/975–996) and allowed the name of al-‘Azīz to be mentioned at the mosque in Constantinople. In 1049 as a result of negotiations, permission was given for prayer to be said for the Saljuqid ruler Toghrul Bey and the Abbasid Caliphate. Obviously, the action had great legitimizing power: whoever was officially recognized at the mosque in Constantinople, that is by the Byzantine authorities, was the foremost leader of the Islamic world.

Thus, the Byzantines played an important role in conferring legitimacy on successive Muslim rulers. Indeed even an incompetent ruler could lay claim to his title on the sole basis of

⁶⁴ Michael Bonner, *The Emergence of the Thughūr: The Arab-Byzantine Frontier in the Early Abbasid Age*, Ph.D., Princeton, 1987, p.12.

the war he carried out against this enemy. If chaos or hardships reigned at home, he could argue that better times would ensue once the enemy was defeated. The presence of this challenging infidel empire distracted the Muslim people from their own government's quagmires and questions of political legitimacy. It also distracted them from real socioeconomic problems whose origins could be blamed on the military expenditures required to fight the enemy. The fighting dragged on, because it served the needs of Muslim rulers. Even once it was recognized that the enemy could not be dislodged, the rhetoric continued for it was to the caliph's benefit to continue the myth.

THE ISSUE OF NOMENCLATURE

The first problem that confronts the reader searching Arabic sources for references to the Byzantines is one of nomenclature. Arab authors use the term Rum to refer to, interchangeably, the Romans, the Byzantines, and to the Christian Melkites. In his chapter concerning the sciences of the Rum, for example, *Ṣā'id al-'*Andalusī begins by describing the Romans in their capital Rome: "the fifth nation is that of the Rum whose capital was the great Rome. It is a great nation with magnificent kings who ruled until the coming of Constantine son of Helen..." *Ṣā'id* then refers to the Christianization of the Empire by Constantine who "built a city on the gulf, known as al-Qustāntīyya, in the middle of the land of the Yūnān and has remained the capital until this day." The same author later refers to the Christians

living and working in Baghdad also as Rum.⁶⁵

Mas'ūdī lists in *Murūj al-Dhahab* the various opinions concerning the origin of the Rum and of their name: Some say that the Rum derive their name from the city of Rome, which is called Romas, and this name was subsequently Arabized and whoever inhabited this city came to be called 'Rum.' Mas'ūdī adds that the Rum call themselves Rominos, a name that the people of the *thugūr* also use when referring to the Byzantines. Mas'ūdī then gives a third opinion that traces the name to one of the ancestors of the Rum and he provides two lineages tracing the genealogy of the Rum in the fashion that Arab authors trace the genealogy of Arab tribes.⁶⁶ He tries, together with other Arab authors, to fit the Rum into the biblical ethnology found in the tenth chapter of Genesis which deals with Noah's three sons: Shem, Ham and Japhet and the lines of filiation of the various nations related to them. However, although they agree that the Arabs are descendants of Shem, there is disagreement about the Byzantines, with some Arab authors assigning them to Japhet and thus making them kinsmen to the Slavs and Turks, and others to

⁶⁵ *Sā'id al-'Andalusī, Tabaqāt al-'Umam* (al-Najaf, 1967), pp. 43-46.

⁶⁶ *Masūdī, Murūj al-Dhahab wa Ma'ādin al-Jawhar*, ed. Ch. Pellat (Beirut, 1966), Vol. 2, p. 32. This discussion is absent from Mas'ūdī's other work, *al-Tanbīh wal-'Ishrāf*. The Byzantines referred to themselves as Rhomanoi and the Arabs called them Rum. The Kievens, however, always called them Greeks, thus defining them by language rather than political prestige. See S. Franklin, "The Empire of the Rhomanoi as Viewed from Kievan Russia: Aspects of the Byzantino-Russian Cultural Relations," *Byzantion* 53 (1983), pp. 507-537.

Shem making them kinsmen to the Arabs.

The Arab authors are aware of the mixed racial composition of the Byzantine Empire: many *Rūs*[Russians] have joined the Rum just like the Armenians, the Bulgars, who are Slavs, *Saqāliba*, and the Pecheneg, who are Turks.⁶⁷ Ibn al-Faqīh says that the inhabitants of the land of the Rum are mostly Rum and Slavs.⁶⁸ In his description of *Bilād al-Rūm*, Ibn Hawqal includes in it the Slavs, the Franks and the Galicians. He states that the Franks and the Galicians speak different languages just as there exist various languages spoken in the Muslim Empire. He states, however, that their religion and administration are the same.⁶⁹ The Arabs were thus aware of the multi-national character of the Byzantine Empire which was never ethnically homogeneous.⁷⁰

Not only is the name Rum applied by the Arab Muslim writers to a number of different groups and peoples, but they also call the Byzantines different names. One was derogatory: the Arabs

⁶⁷al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbīh*, p.141.

⁶⁸Ibn-al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, Ed. De Goeje (Leiden, 1967), p.136.

⁶⁹Ibn Hawqal, Abul-Qāsim, *Kitāb Sūrat al-'Ard*, Ed. J.H. Kramers (Leiden, 1967), p.14.

⁷⁰The Byzantine historian Genesius, in discussing the revolt of Thomas the Slavonian(820-3), listed a variety of peoples from whom the army of the rebels had been drawn: Saracens, Indians, Assyrians, Abasgians, Getae, Alans, Zichs...In Peter Charanis, "Observations on the Demography of the Byzantine Empire," *Thirteenth International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Main Paper XIV, Oxford 1966*, pp.1-19. Reprinted in *Studies on the Demography of the Byzantine Empire*, (Variorum reprints, London, 1972)*1.

referred to the Byzantine as 'ilj which was very close to the concept of the barbarian. In this context it meant a non-Muslim and did not carry with it the connotation of an inferior state of humanity. The opposition was also a linguistic one. In the classical sources, the word barbaros was synonymous with "speaking an intelligible tongue." However, it came to be equalled with a people or a person possessed of brutality and rudeness. In the post-classical period it was used mainly in a religious sense to denote gentiles, Jews and heretics as opposed to Orthodox.⁷¹ 'Ilj is the term with which the poet Abu Firās al-Hamadhānī referred to Nicephorus Phocas: "one of the most astonishing things is a 'ilj explaining to me the admissible, *halāl*, and the forbidden, *harām*. The other, more notable name used in the Arabic sources, was that of *Banū al-'Asfar*, a name which occasioned much discussion among the Arabs. Ibn al-Faqīh offered the following explanation: The king of Rum died and there was not a single person in the whole Byzantine Empire who was fit to rule except for a woman. The Byzantines, therefore, decided to take up as a ruler the first man coming out of the passes. A runaway Ethiopian slave appeared and the Byzantines forced him to marry their Queen and become their ruler. The Ethiopian slave

⁷¹Vassilios Christides, *The Image of the Pre-Islamic Arab in the Byzantine Sources*, Princeton, Ph.D., 1970, pp.104-108. Christides states that in the early Byzantine period the non-subjects of the Empire were barabaroi. The Arabs were considered so, as bearers of a different culture and a different religion. They were called barbarians in function of their enmity to Byzantium. If they were Christianized or were the Empire's allies, they would no longer be called barbaroi. pp.109-112.

and the Queen had a son who was named *al-'Aṣfar*, the yellow one, because he descended from a white woman and a black man.⁷² In this way, the Byzantines of Ibn al-Faqīh's day are made to be descended from a slave and a black one at that. At least as serious is the implication that the first run away slave to happen along is more fit to rule the Empire than is a Byzantine man or woman. To the Arabs, for whom the centrality of blood was paramount, a person's nature and worth were closely tied to the worthiness of his stock. By crediting the Byzantines with no line to the past, or more insulting, a line to an inferior past, they were making a statement about their present worthlessness. Ibn Qutaiba's explanation is less imaginative: the ancestor of the Rum had very yellow skin and thus they came to be called *Bandū al-'Aṣfar*.⁷³ Other authors did not accept "*al-'Aṣfar*" as a color designation at all, but rather saw in it a name: '*Aṣfar*, the grandson of Esau'.⁷⁴

One of the most interesting aspects of the confusion has to do

⁷²Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, p.149.

⁷³Ibn Qutaiba, *Kitāb al-Ma'ārif*, ed. Th. Akkasha (Cairo, 1960), p.38.

⁷⁴Ignaz Goldziher has a brief analysis of the various colors the Arabs used to refer to other people. *Muslim Studies*, trans. by C.R Barber and S.M. Stern (London, 1967), vol. 2, pp. 243-5. The problem of nomenclature was not restricted to the Muslim Arab authors. The confusion was also shared by the Arab Christian authors. See article by Khalil Samir, "Quelques notes sur les termes Rum et Rumi dans la tradition arabe," in *La nozione di Romano tra cittadinanza e universalità* (Napoli, 1984), pp. 651-478.

with the connection between the Ancient Greeks and the Byzantines. To the Muslims who came to see him in Antioch, Emperor Heraclius (610–641) showed them a series of images representing all the prophets up until the Prophet Muhammad, as they were conceived by the Muslim imagination. God had given these pictures to Adam and they were inherited by different peoples until they ended with Dhū al-Qarnain, i.e. Alexander the Great, and from him to the Byzantine emperors. The Byzantines were thus the inheritors of Ancient Greece. However, while some Arab authors confuse the Byzantines and the Ancient Greeks, a few are very keen to separate the two groups in an attempt at undermining the prestige of the Byzantines.

THE IMAGE OF THE BYZANTINES: THEIR PHILOSOPHICAL AND SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE

A lot of the heat in this discussion turned around the role of the Byzantines in the scientific knowledge the Muslims were intent on acquiring, which passed to them through the Byzantines. At issue was the extent to which the Byzantines would be credited for the learning of the Ancient Greeks. In *al-Radd 'ala al-Nasāra*, Jāhīz insists that Science and wisdom belonged to the Ancient Greeks, a nation that has disappeared leaving behind the vestiges of their reason, *'āthār 'uqūlihim*. The Ancient Greeks had a different religion and a different literature:

"The Rum are not 'ulamā'; they are artisans, *ṣunnā'*, who took to writing because of their geographical proximity to the land of the Ancient Greeks. The Rum subsequently attributed to themselves some of the books of the Ancient Greeks. However, since the Rum could not change the names of the most famous Greek authors they ended up claiming that the *Yunān* are in fact a tribe of the Rum... *Kitāb al-Manṭiq* and *Kitāb al-Kawn wal-Fasād* were written by Aristotle who was neither Rum nor Christian; the same goes for Euclid who wrote the *Almageste*⁷⁵, Galen who wrote the *Medicine*, Hippocrates, Plato and many others were neither Rum nor Christian... In reality, the Christians and the Rum have neither science, nor expository literature, *bayān*, nor vision, *bi'd rū'yā*, and their names should be erased from the registers of the philosophers and of wise men."⁷⁶ There was a lively discussion between Logicians and philosophers in the fourth century. The logicians were proud of their knowledge of antiquity and had a deep admiration for the philosophy of the classical thinkers. They were convinced of the superiority of Greek wisdom and language, a conviction that is found in the works of the philosopher Muhammad Ibn Zakariyya

⁷⁵Ptolemy is the author of *Almageste*. Euclid is the author of the *Elements* from which the Arabs derived most of their early information about the theory of numbers, *'ilm al 'adad*. See AbdelHamid Sabra, "The Exact Sciences," *The Genius of Arab Civilization*(MIT Press, 1983), pp.149-168.

⁷⁶al-Jahīz, *al-Radd 'ala al-Naṣāra*, ed. by Abd al-Salam Harun (Cairo, 1979) Vol. 3, pp. 314-15. See translation in I.S. Allouche "Un Traité de Polémique Christiano-Musulmanne au IXème Siècle," *Hesperis* (1939 2eme trimestre), pp. 123-155

al-*Rāzī*(d.925/313): "We also found as a generally valid matter that no other nation has a more subtle flair, nor a more manifest wisdom than the Greek nation."⁷⁷ Al-*Tawhīdī*, quoting Ibn al-*Muqaffā'*(d.759), says that the Rum are only skilled in architecture and geometry.⁷⁸

Al-*Mas'ūdī* says that the Rum were neighbors to the Ancient Greeks, and at a certain point defeated and conquered them, annexing their territory and assimilating their people. He likens their history to that of the Nabateans and the Sassanians, except that the Ancient Greeks and the Rum did not maintain separate genealogies.⁷⁹ The Rum who replaced the Greeks were in his eyes but pale imitators. Of a different ethnic origin, their language is poorer and less pure.⁸⁰

In *Tabaqāt al-'Umām*, *Šā'īd al-'Andalusī* states that the Romans had in Rome and other towns eminent sages and learned men well versed in the different branches of philosophy. He points out that a large number of people say that the celebrated philosophers were Rum: "The truth is that they are *Yūnān*,

⁷⁷ Muhammad Ibn Zakariyya al-*Rāzī*, *Rasā'il Falsafiyā*, ed. P. Kraus(Cairo, 1939) I, 43, 14-15.

⁷⁸ al-*Tawhīdī*, *Kitāb al-'Imtā' wal Mu'ānasa*, Ed. Ahmad Amin (Cairo, 1951), p.71.

⁷⁹ al-*Mas'ūdī*, *al-Tanbīh*, pp.182 and 188.

⁸⁰ al-*Mas'ūdī*, *Muřūj*, Vol.2, p. 5. H. Horst has analized a few of the major Muslim sources and concluded that the idea of who the Rum were, and how they are separated from the *Yūnān*, the Ancient Greeks, is not at all clear in Arabic classical literature. "Über die Römer," *Die Islamische Welt zwischen Mittelalter und Neuzeit*, ed. U. Haarman and P. Bachman(Beirut, 1973), pp. 315-337.

Ancient Greeks. However, due to the contact between these two nations, namely, the Yunān and the Rum, and to the close proximity of their countries, and due to the transfer of power from one to the other, the two became one country and one unified Empire so that the Rum and the Greeks were amalgamated and it became difficult to distinguish between the philosophers of the two nations. Those who possess sound knowledge of history and know the biographies of great men believe that both these nations were famous for their interest in philosophy. Nevertheless, the ancient Greeks enjoyed a distinction and a superiority in this respect which was contested neither by the Rum nor by anyone else.⁸¹ Sharaf al-Zamān Tāhir al-Marwāzī, who was a court physician of the great Saljuqid Sultan Malik Shah(d.485/1092), wrote: "And as to the sciences and occult philosophies and other worthy matters which are attributed to them [the Rum], they do not truly belong to them, but to the Ionian sages who mixed with them and who are celebrated for the subtlety of their thought and the keenness of their intelligence in what they have discovered of sciences and created of philosophy."⁸²

Ibn Garcia, writing in Spain in the mid-eleventh century said: The non-Arabs are wise, mighty in knowledge, endowed with insight into natural philosophy and into the sciences of exact logic such as the students of astronomy and music and the experts in

⁸¹ Sa'īd al-'Andalusi, *Tabaqāt al-'Ummām*, p.46.

⁸² Text and translation by Vladimir Minorski, "Marvazi on the Byzantines," in *Medieval Iran and its Neighbours*(Variorum Reprints, London, 1982)*VII.

arithmetic and geometry. They have priority in analytic and poetics, ability in the sciences of religious ordinances and natural laws, skill in the field of holy and physical law...and they mastered what you will of investigation and research. They made themselves masters of the physical and religious sciences and not of the description of towering camels.⁸³ However in his refutation of the letter of Ibn Garcia, Abu Yahya Ibn Mas'ada, writing a century later in the Almohad court, rejects the claim of Ibn Garcia concerning the knowledge of the Byzantines stating: "And what you boasted concerning the students of astronomy and of the knowledge of arithmetic and analytics, is like the boasting of the slave girl over the howdad of her lady. That honor belongs to the Greek and Sassanian discoverers, to the priests of Babel, Chaldea and Kashan who were masters of the natural and exact sciences; they were the Pythagorean generation and the philosophers of Hermes. These were landmarks whose remains your kings erased and whose lights they extinguished through the aberration of your King Constantine."⁸⁴

Al-Tawhīdī does not confound the Ancient Greeks with the Byzantines. He mentions during one discussion that "the Yunān possess the qualities of deduction, research and discovery."⁸⁵

⁸³ *Risāla* of Ibn Garcia, trans. by James Monroe in *The Shu'ubiyya in Al-Andalus* (Los Angeles, 1970), p. 27.

⁸⁴ Abu Yahya Ibn Mas'ada, "Refutation to Ibn Garcia," *The Shu'ubiyya in Al-'Andalus*, ibid. pp.45-6. The letter of Ibn Garcia and the refutations of it are part of the Shu'biyya controversy that took place in Spain.

⁸⁵ al-Tawhīdī, *al-'Imtā' wal Mu'ānasa*, p. 212.

Like al-Tawhīdī, al-Mas'ūdī points to the development of philosophy, *hikma*, during the age of the Ancient Greeks: "the sciences remained strong and well-rooted until the time Christianity spread among the Rum." Christianity constituted the fatal blow for the scientific edifice: the vestiges of Science disappeared and its methods were erased and all what the ancient Greeks had demonstrated, proved and discovered was gone.⁸⁶

A similar statement is found in the *Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm. In his chapter on the philosophers, Ibn al-Nadīm says that philosophy was a phenomenon among the Greeks and the Rum until the appearance of Christianity. For when the Rum became Christians, philosophy became a forbidden subject and some philosophy books were burned while others were stored. People were prevented from discussing any philosophical subject if it went against [Christian] prophetic *shari'a*.⁸⁷

At times, utter contempt towards Byzantine scientific knowledge was expressed by the Arab authors. The geographer Ibn al-Faqīh tells in *Kitāb al-Buldān* the story of the Muslim ambassador 'Umāra Ibn Hamza who was sent to Constantinople to deliver a message to the Byzantine Emperor. The Byzantine Emperor showed him tamarisk trees that were being guarded behind high walls and described to the Arab ambassador the medicinal and nutritional value of the tree. 'Umāra said to himself: "If the Emperor only knew that in our country the wood

⁸⁶ al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, Vol. 2, pp. 45-46.

⁸⁷ Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist* (Cairo, n.d.) p. 351. Trans. by B. Dodge (New York, 1970) Vol. 2 p. 579.

of this tree is used by the depraved alone!" Then the Byzantine Emperor showed him *jawārīsh*⁸⁸ and described to him its high medicinal value. Again 'Umāra said to himself: "If the Emperor only knew that this plant is found in our most ruined places and in our deserts and that it is available to whoever wants it!"⁸⁹ The clear contempt in this story betrays an obvious feeling of superior scientific knowledge. Ibn al-Farra in *Kitāb al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk* says that the Rum are equal in stupidity and in their lack of scientific knowledge.⁹⁰

In the same contemptuous vein, Ibn al-Faqīh relates a story whose heroes are the Sassanian king Chosroes Anushiravan(531-579) and his physician Zarashid. Zarashid had lived in the land of the Rum, learned their language and read their books. Anushiravan asked his physician about the scientific knowledge of the Byzantine and Zarashid described it as minimal and said that the boastful among them brags about books in logic for logic is their goal; as for their knowledge of medicine, the Byzantines know only about the humors, the simple matter and they treat fever and coldness as well as the excess of the bile and the phlegm with drugs. Zarashid said to Chosroes that the Byzantines have very little knowledge to add in the field of astronomy.⁹¹

In some of the accounts, the scientific knowledge of the

⁸⁸Plant with big leaves and with round white grains, planted in hot countries and of a lesser quality than wheat.

⁸⁹Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, p.138.

⁹⁰Ibn al-Farra, *Kitāb al-Rusul wal Mulūk wa Man Yasluh Lil Risāla wal Safāra*, Ed. S. Al Munajjid (Cairo, 1947), p. 37.

⁹¹Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, p.144.

Byzantines seems at time to be verging more towards the magical: 'Umāra Ibn Ḥamza, the Arab ambassador, witnessed a fantastic experiment in alchemy that the Byzantine Emperor himself performed in front of him. The Emperor melted copper, added some white powder and the metal was transformed to silver; when a red powder was added to the melted copper the result was gold.⁹²

On the other hand, the Arabs could not deny that the Byzantines were repositories of ancient Greek knowledge. The Arab authors appreciated the Byzantines for having preserved the ancient material, allowing the Muslims to copy and translate it. There is a legend that Caliph al-Ma'mūn(198-218/813-833) wrote to the Byzantine Emperor asking permission to obtain a selection of old scientific manuscripts stored and treasured in the Byzantine country. Ishāq Ibn Shahrām mentioned an old temple three days away from Constantinople which had been closed since the Christianization of the Empire where the ancient Greeks used to worship planets and idols. In this temple was a thousand camel loads of ancient books.⁹³ The Muslims were clearly impressed

⁹²Ibid., p.138-139. The main tenet of Alchemy was that the base metals, tin lead, iron and copper could be transmuted into gold or silver by means of a mysterious substance called Elixir or the Philosopher's Stone. Alchemy also sought to compound the elixir of life. This art had many opponents throughout the Islamic period. Al-Jāhīz and al-Kindī were among its staunchest critics. On the other hand, Abu Bakr al-Rāzī(d.925) was a strong supporter of Alchemy and wrote a work which was edited by Julius Ruska: *Das Buch der Alaune und Salze*(Berlin, 1935). The most comprehensive study on the history of Alchemy is still the work of M. Berthelot, *Les Origines de l'Alchimie*(Paris, 1885).

by the material preserved by the Byzantines. The material, unlike knowledge which is abstract and thus easier to ignore, is palpable and concrete and could not be avoided.

It becomes clear that the Arab authors are ambivalent in their assessment of the scientific knowledge of the Byzantines when one reads the conflicting statements, sometimes within the same text. While many Arab authors try to deprecate the Byzantines' abilities in the scientific and philosophical domains by pointing to the ancient Greeks as the source of all such knowledge, nonetheless we read Ibn al-Faqīh stating in *Kitāb al-Buldān* that in addition to being craftsmen, the Byzantines are philosophers and physicians.⁹⁴ Al-Jāhīz says that the "Rum are a nation of theologians, physicians, astronomers, wise men, arithmeticians and that they possess the rules of music."⁹⁵ Abu Zaid al-Balkhī stresses their knowledge of medicine in particular as he states that the science of medicine flourished in the cities of Jundishapur, Tustar, and Ahwāz following the capture of Byzantines by the Persian King Shapur and their settlement in those cities.⁹⁶ Tawhīdī also states that each nation, 'umma, each people, *qawm* and each grouping has qualities and shortcomings: the Rum for instance excel in science and wisdom,

⁹³Ibid. pp. 353-4. Ibn Shahrām was sent as an envoy to Emperor Basil II by 'Adud al-Dawlah.

⁹⁴Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, p.136.

⁹⁵al-Jāhīz, *al-Akhbār wa Kayfa Tasuh*, Text and Trans. By Charles Pellat, *Journal Asiatique* CLLV(1967), pp.65-105, p. 98.

⁹⁶Abu Zaid al-Balkhī, Ahmad, *Kitāb al-Bad' wa al-Tārikh*, Ed. Clement Huart (Paris, 1889), Vol. 3, p.157.

they know nothing else.⁹⁷ Al-Jāhīz questioning their intelligence, brings forth the idea that in their material existence, the people belonging to the civilized nations, that is the Indians, the Persians, the Arabs and the Byzantines manifest diverse qualities of intelligence; however, once one goes from the intellectual sphere to the spiritual one, one is shocked by the antinomy because their religious systems are totally irrational.⁹⁸ There is a great deal of ambivalence concerning the knowledge and wisdom of the Rum which is complicated by the confusion in the Arabic texts between the Ancient Greeks, the Romans and the Byzantines. It is thus difficult to conciliate the various statements which are contradictory and it is necessary to stress the ambivalence that predominates as one of the main themes of the Byzantine image.

THE IMAGE OF THE BYZANTINES: THE BYZANTINES AS CRAFTSMEN

Most Arab authors however agree that certain skills belong first and foremost to the Byzantines: "The Byzantines are the most skilled nation in painting... Their painters paint human beings without leaving any detail out for the Byzantine painter is not satisfied with the painting until he turns the figure into a young man, a middle aged man or an old man; he then makes the figure handsome and charming and then makes it laughing or crying; The painter even manages to distinguish in his painting

⁹⁷ al-Tawhīdī, *al-'Imtā' wal Mu'ānasa*, p.71.

⁹⁸ This is the fundamental idea in his *Kitāb al-'Akhbār wa Kayfa Tasuh*.

between on the one hand a sarcastic smile and a shy one and on the other hand between gaiety and the laughter of a delirious person.⁹⁹ Similarly, Marwazi states that "as for the applied arts, *al-ṣanā'i' al-mihaniyya*, the Rum are indisputable masters in them and no one surpasses them in them excepting the Chinese."¹⁰⁰ The Rum, the Arab authors agree, are skilled artisans in all techniques. They excel in carpentry, sculpture, painting and in the weaving of the silk brocade, *bazyūn*.¹⁰¹ Byzantine brocades were highly valued as is witnessed by an anecdote in *Laṭā'if al-Ma'ārif* of Thālibī. There Abu Dulaf al-Khazrajī prays God to bring to him certain good things among which he lists the brocades of the Rum.¹⁰²

Ibn al-Farra, in his *Kitāb al-Rusul wal-Mulūk* stresses that the Byzantines are primarily craftsmen. Indeed they have relinquished fighting and have become dwellers, owners of land, and artisans. They raise sheep, cows and horses.¹⁰³ They fabricate perfumes and red coral.¹⁰⁴ The judge of Rayy, 'Abd al-Jabbār, wrote that the common people in the Byzantine Empire are artisans and tradesmen.¹⁰⁵

Records speak quite often of the reverence in which Byzantine

⁹⁹ Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, p.136. An approximately identical passage is found in al-Jāhīz, *Kitāb al-'Akhbār*, p. 86.

¹⁰⁰ V. Minorski, "Marvazi on the Byzantines."

¹⁰¹ al-Jāhīz, *al-Radd 'ala al-Naṣāra*, p. 314.

¹⁰² *Laṭā'if al-Ma'ārif*, trans. by Bosworth, p.145.

¹⁰³ Ibn al-Farra, *Kitāb al-Rusul*, p.36.

¹⁰⁴ Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, p.148.

¹⁰⁵ 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbit Dālā'il al-Nubuwwa*, Ed. Abd al-Karim 'Uthmān (Beirut, 1966) Vol.1, p.160.

craftsmen were held in Persia and of the skill of their engineers. Thus, even the Persians, whose great civilization matched that of the Greeks for millennia, used the skills of the Byzantines to build cities and erect buildings. One of the early historical sources, *al-Akhbār al-Tiwāl* of al-Dinawari (d. 282/842) mentions that the Persian Queen Khumani invaded *bilād al-rūm* where she captured Byzantine masons and ordered them to build three 'iwan: one in Istakhr, another on the way from Istakhr to Khurasan and a third one two parasangs away from Istakhr.¹⁰⁶ Later on Chosroes conquered Antioch which was "the greatest city in al-Shām and al-Jazīra." He captured its population and transferred them to Iraq where he ordered that a city be built for them, a city that would be an exact copy of Antioch with respect to the streets, houses and monuments. It was called al-Rūmiyya and was built next to al-Madā'in. When the Byzantine captives were released there, each went to the house which resembled his own in Antioch.¹⁰⁷ In another anecdote, Sabur is said to have captured the heir to the throne of the Byzantine Emperor. As a pre-condition for release, Sabur ordered him to build a *qantara*, an arch, on the Tustar river. The Byzantine emperor sent him the necessary money and labor for the construction.¹⁰⁸ Mas'ūdī also states that Sabur invaded *bilād al-*

¹⁰⁶ al-Dinawari, Abu Ḥanīfa, *Kitāb al-Akhbār al-Tiwāl*, ed. A. 'Abd al-Mun'im et. al (Cairo, 1960), pp. 27-28.

¹⁰⁷ al-Dinawari, Ibid., p. 69. Abu Mansur al-Thā'ālibī, *Ghurar Akhbār Mu'lūk al-Furs wa Siyārahim*, ed. and trans. by H. Zotenberg, Paris MDCCCC (Tehran, 1963), pp. 612-13.

¹⁰⁸ Al-Dinawari, *Al-Akhbār al-Tiwāl*, Ibid., p. 46.

ram and transferred some of the inhabitants to Sus, Tustar and other places in al-'Ahwāz. Since then, brocade started being manufactured there along with other kinds of silk.¹⁰⁹ Historically, the Arab authors' position is valid as even the Persians, acknowledged the superiority of Byzantine skills. It becomes natural for the Arabs to demand such help.

And indeed, The Arabs' respect for Byzantine abilities was made concrete by the Umayyad Caliph al-Walīd's request for the help of Byzantine artisans for the decoration of the mosques in Damascus and Madina. One tradition is contained in the chronicle of Ṭabarī: "We began to pull down the mosque of the Prophet in Safar 88[January 707]. Al-Walīd had sent to inform the lord of the Rum, *sāhib al-rūm*, that he had ordered the demolition of the Mosque of the Prophet and that he should aid him in this work. The latter sent him 100,000 *mithqāls* of gold and sent him also 100 workmen and 40 loads of mosaic cubes; he gave orders to search for mosaic cubes in ruined cities and then sent them to al-Walīd, who sent them to 'Umar Ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz."¹¹⁰ The geographer al-Maqdīsī says of the Umayyad mosque: It is said that al-Walīd gathered together for the construction work skilled artisans from Persia, India, the Maghrib, and Byzantium and expended on it seven years' land-tax in Syria, also eighteen shiploads of gold and silver brought from Cyprus, not counting the implements and mosaics sent as gifts by the Emperor of Byzantium. Caliph al-Walīd is supposed to have needed Byzantine

¹⁰⁹ al-Mas'ūdī, *Muřūj*, Vol.1, pp. 330-1.

¹¹⁰ al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Rusul*, Tertia Series, Vol.2, p. 1194.

help so much that he blackmailed the Emperor by threatening to destroy the churches in Muslim land if his request was not met.¹¹¹

This event was interpreted in opposite ways by the Muslims and the Byzantines. To the Byzantines it was an imperial act granting to "barbarians" the privileged use of highly technical training which by its very quality served to enhance the prestige of the Byzantine emperor and bring the "barbarians" into the imperial fold. On the other hand, the call for artists and artisans symbolized the Byzantine emperor's subservience to the Muslims as he had to provide them with artisans. Caliph al-Walid's request may have derived simply from the convictions that first rate work could only come from Byzantium. However, Maqdisi gave a different reason for the erection of the superb building when he asked his uncle "why al-Walid had been so extravagant in spending the money of the Muslims on these buildings when it could have been better employed on rebuilding fortresses, repairing roads... His uncle replied: Don't imagine things like that, my son. Al-Walid was divinely guided towards a matter of great importance. He looked out upon Syria, the land of the Christians, and saw there fine churches, with alluring decorative works and having great fame such as the Church of the Resurrection and those of Lydda and Edessa. So he set up for the Muslims a mosque which would divert their attention from these churches, and he made it one of the wonders of the earth. Do

¹¹¹al-Maqdisi, *Ahsan al-Taqāsim*, p.157.

you not realize that 'Abd al-Malik, when he saw the imposing and inspiring dome of the church of the Resurrection, was afraid lest it assume an equally large place in the Muslims' heart and so he built on the rock a dome, as you see?"¹¹²

To al-Walid, the sponsorship of superb monuments was another step in his quest for possessing all the characteristics of an exalted king. The importance of ceremonial was becoming clearer to the Muslim rulers and they attempted to vie on all planes with the Byzantine Empire and its emperors. Thus their administrative imitations and their adaptations should be understood in this light.¹¹³ The buildings of al-Walid in Jerusalem, Damascus and Medina remained central sanctuaries and testified to the skills of the Byzantine artisans. Later on, in the tenth century, the Umayyad Caliph of Spain al-Hakam II (961-976) sent to Emperor Nicephorus Phocas a deputation whose mission was to get back to Spain a specialist in mosaics in order to supervise the decoration of the new parts in the mosque at Cordova.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Ibid., p. 158.

¹¹³ H.A. R. Gibb, "Arab-Byzantine Relations under the Umayyad Caliphate," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 12 (1958), pp. 219-33. Also in *Studies on the Civilization of Islam* (Princeton, 1982), pp. 47-61. Oleg Grabar, "Islamic Art and Byzantium," *DOP* 18 (1964), pp. 69-89. Both Gibb and Grabar have their own interpretations of the intentions of Caliph al-Walid.

¹¹⁴ E. Levi-Provencal, *L'Espagne musulmane au Xème siècle, institutions et vie sociale* (Paris, 1932), p. 217. Doubts have arisen concerning this account precisely because of similar traditions attached to the mosque of Damascus. Elie Lambert, "La Grande Mosquée de Cordoue et l'Art Byzantin," *Actes du Sixième Congrès International d'Etudes Byzantines* (Paris, 1951),

Thus while the opinions concerning the knowledge and the Sciences of the Byzantines are not unified, one finds real appreciation of Byzantine skills in architecture and craftsmanship. "In the domains of construction, carpentry, craftsmanship, turnery, the Byzantines have no equal."¹¹⁵ Despite the religious difference and the military and political antagonism, one finds in the sources an idealization of the Byzantines as the master artists and craftsmen.

THE CHARACTER AND PRACTICES OF THE BYZANTINES

The Arabs tend to express unfavorable judgements concerning the character and practices of the Byzantines and there seems to be less ambivalence here. Treachery is one of the most common accusations thrown at the Byzantines. The Fatimid Caliph al-Mu'izz told the Byzantine ambassador who had asked him for an extension of the truce: "as long as he [the Byzantine Emperor] keeps the terms, we shall not open hostilities; we shall not act in a perfidious and treacherous manner as is your custom."¹¹⁶ The Byzantines are unfaithful for they do not keep their promises. Even their Emperor does not take an oath of faithfulness.¹¹⁷

pp. 225-233, states that it does not seem doubtful that the art of mosaics was in Cordova a direct importation from Byzantium.

¹¹⁵ al-Jāhīz, *al-Akhbār wa Kayfa Tasuh*.

¹¹⁶ Al-Qādī al-Nu'mān, *Al-Majālis wal-Musāyarāt* (Tunis, 1978), p. 368.

¹¹⁷ al-Dinawarī, *Al Akhbār al-Tiwal*, p. 363; al-Balkhī, *Kitāb al-Bad' wal Tārikh*, Vol. VI, p. 45. Iṣṭifān al-Duwaihī the Patriarch of the Maronites in 1668 and their first historian took up the theme of Byzantine perfidy in his interpretation of the history of

Their military victories are often the result of perfidy. In commenting on the verses of *Sūrat al-Rūm*, al-Tabārī explains the subsequent Byzantine victory as a result of a secret agreement between the Byzantine Emperor and the Persian commander Sharhaburaz who betrayed the Persian King.¹¹⁸ The biggest story of betrayal occurred during Maslama's siege of Constantinople in 717 when the Patrician Leo broke his promise to the Muslim commander. Here, like elsewhere in the Arabic sources, the victory of the Rum is the result of perfidy.¹¹⁹

The Byzantines were said to win their battles mostly through treachery: "they acquire information on the affairs of the Muslim Empire through their agents and spies. This allows them to know about the vulnerable points of the Caliphate's territory and to penetrate to the interior of the country, its plains and mountains."¹²⁰ A Persian physician who had lived in land of the Byzantines, learned their language, and read their books, denied the Byzantines the qualities of courage and succor.¹²¹ Al-'Azdī claims that the inhabitants of Fihl preferred the Muslims over the

the Maronites: Their ancestors, the Mardaites, had undertaken the heroic defense of the cause of Eastern Christendom until they were betrayed by the perfidious Byzantines. See Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions; The History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (Los Angeles, 1988).

¹¹⁸ al-Tabārī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān* (Cairo, 1954), Vol. 16, p. 19.

¹¹⁹ See e.g. al-Dinawari's *Kitāb al-Bad' wal-Tārīkh*, Vol. 6, pp. 43-44 as well as the account in *Kitāb al-'Uyān*.

¹²⁰ Ibn Hawqal, *Kitāb Surat al-'Ard*, p. 198.

¹²¹ Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, p. 44.

Byzantines although the latter were Christians like them, because Muslims keep their promise, are more merciful, less unjust and better governors.¹²²

On the other hand, a positive comment on the Byzantines associated with the early period is attributed to the Muslim commander 'Amr Ibn al-'Āṣ (d.34/644) who credits the Byzantines with five virtues: "They are the best in perseverance during adversity and strife, the quickest to recover from the effects of a disaster, the quickest to return to fighting after apparent flight, the best in their treatment of the orphans and the weak, the strongest in their protection against the oppression of kings."¹²³

To the Arabs, for whom the quality of generosity was highly valued, the miserliness of the Rum was shocking. Al-Jāhīz states that "the Rum are miserly, less than the Slavs but more than the Persians." He claims that there is no word in the language of the Byzantines that designates generosity. This miserliness is not inspired by fear of misery but is the result of habit or of an innate character of the Byzantines.¹²⁴ Abu al-Tayyib al-Qarawī (d.493/1099) also states that there is no noun denoting generosity in the Byzantine tongue.¹²⁵

Particularly horrifying in Arab eyes was the Byzantine custom of castrating children especially those destined to be consecrated to

¹²²al-Azdī, *Kitāb Futūh al-Shām*, Ed. Ensign Lees (Calcutta, 1874), p.97.

¹²³Muslim, *Sahīh* (Beirut, 1972) Vol.4, Book 52, #10, p. 2897.

¹²⁴al-Jāhīz, *al-Bukhalā'* trans. by Ch. Pellat, *Les avares*, pp. 232 and 282.

¹²⁵"The fourth refutation to Ibn Garcia," translated by James Monroe in *The Shu'ūbiyya in al-'Andalus*, p.76.

the service of the church: "The Byzantines are the originators of this custom which is in contradiction with the spirit of kindness and mercy."¹²⁶ Al-Jāhīz accuses the Rum together with the Saqāliba, the Slavs, of being the only nation that practices castration which is the most odious crime and is a sign of their lack of pity and of the corruption of their heart. The Byzantines mutilate innocent children who cannot defend themselves and have even reached the point of castrating their own children and selling them.¹²⁷ If they capture Muslims, they take the children and castrate them in large numbers many of whom die as a result. They claim to have compassion and mercy whereas castration is not in the canonical law or the Torah.¹²⁸ However, The Prophet is also supposed to have said, "compassion is a characteristic of the Rum."¹²⁹ Perhaps this quality was supposed to be shown only towards their people.¹²⁹ The eunuchs in the Muslim Empire hold the Byzantines responsible for their mutilation and that is why the Muslims fight the Byzantines so fervently.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ al-Jāhīz, *Kitāb al-Hayawān* (Cairo, 1938-45) Vol. I, p.124. Al-Mas'ūdī, *Mu'ājiz*, Vol. 8, p.148.

¹²⁷ al-Jāhīz, *al-Radd 'ala al-Naṣāra*, pp. 22-23.

¹²⁸ Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa*, Vol. I, p.168.

¹²⁹ A. Shboul, "Arab Attributes towards Byzantium: Official, Learned, Popular," In *Essays Presented to Joan Hussey for her 80th Birthday*, 1988. Quotation of the Prophet found in *Lisān al-Din ibn al-Khaṭīb*, *Khulāṣat al-Ḥāfiẓ*, ms. Istanbul.

¹³⁰ al-Jāhīz, *al-Hayawān*, Vol.1, pp.124-125.

One quality that the Arab Muslims assigned to Byzantines was that of beauty. In time, certain conventional descriptions had emerged and became common stereotypes for various groups. In *Tabaqāt al-'Umam* Ṣā'id al-'Andalusi says that the king of Rum is called the king of human beings because his subjects among all human beings are those who have the most beautiful faces, the best built bodies and the most robust constitutions.¹³¹ Ṣā'id al-'Andalusi is not alone in praising the Byzantines' bodily constitution for al-Tawhīdī, quoting Ibn al-Muqaffa', says too that the Rum have strong bodies.¹³²

Thus the most clear positive characteristic is again one that cannot be denied because it is physical. However, most often this characteristic, beauty, is linked with Byzantine women. The Arab authors are practically unanimous on the beauty of Byzantine women:

"During one of the incursions led by the Prophet Muḥammad, the Prophet asked Jādd Ibn Qais of Banū Salīma whether he would like to fight Banū al-'Aṣfar and Jādd replied: "Will you allow me to stay behind so as not to be tempted, for everyone knows that I am deeply attracted to women and I am afraid that if I see the Byzantine women, I shall not be able to control myself."¹³³

¹³⁰al-Jāhīz, *al-Hayawān*, Vol.1, pp.124-125.

¹³¹Ṣā'id al-'Andalusi, *Tabaqāt al-'Umam*, trans. by R. Blachere, p.44.

¹³²al-Tawhīdī, *al-'Imtā' wal Mu'ānasa*, p.71. Ibn al-Muqaffa' is an eighth century Arabic prose writer. He is author of *Kalila wa Dimna*, *al-'Adab al-Kabīr* and *al-'Adab al-Saghīr*.

¹³³Ibn Hishām, *Sīrat al-Nabī*, ed. M. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo, n.d.)

Another Byzantine woman is present in the history of Caliph Harūn al-Rashīd (170–193/786–809), who had taken captive the daughter of the patrician of the fortress of Heraclea. She was beautiful and captured his heart and he built for her a fortress on the Euphrates which he called Heraclea to remind her of her own fortress in *bilād al-rūm*.¹³⁴ Emperor Nicephorus I (802–811) sent to the Caliph his two most important patricians along with gifts, perfumes and one of his tents, to request the girl's freedom. Emperor Nicephorus pledged that this request "will neither harm your religion, nor your interests in this world..."¹³⁵

The Byzantine woman can also be a sort of a "femme fatale." The Arab authors mention the daughter of the Byzantine Emperor with whom the sixth Arab poet Imru' al-Qais fell in love. She was thus indirectly the cause of his death as her father the Emperor, in anger, sent Imru' al-Qais a poisoned shirt as a gift. In *al-Mahāsin wa al-Adād*, the author says that Imru' al-Qais contacted the Byzantine princess and tried to deceive her.¹³⁶

A more detrimental role was played by the daughter of the Byzantine Emperor Julian (361–3). The Persian King Sabur Dhū al-'Aktāf (Shapur II, 310–379) was held prisoner in the palace of Emperor Julian after having been caught either during a war or while he was spying on the affairs of the Byzantine Empire. The daughter of the Emperor fell in love with him and freed him,

Vol. 4, p. 170.

¹³⁴ *al-Mas'ūdī, Murūj*, Vol. 2, p. 58.

¹³⁵ *Tabarī, Tārīkh al-Rusul*, Tertia Series, II, p. 710.

¹³⁶ *Pseudo-Jāhīz, al-Mahāsin wa al-Adād* (Leiden, 1898), p. 289.

thus endangering the Byzantine Empire, for Persia was its foremost enemy. Sabur succeeded finally in killing Julian.¹³⁷

The Arab authors, all male, tend to note the outrageous and unexpected aspects of female life rather than its regular achievements and routine. Al-Jāḥīz notices that the Byzantine women are not excised and this is why they are among "the most shameless women in the whole world."¹³⁸ According to Abd al-Jabbar, the women who marry are largely chaste; however, those who are not married are adultresses having probably started fornicating while still in their parents' home.¹³⁹ He states that Byzantine women are not veiled and when wedded, they pass the people in the market with an uncovered head and face showing all their beauty.¹⁴⁰ In fact, in Byzantium whatever the social reality, women were seen to be retiring, shy, extremely modest and fond of seclusion, devoted to their families and to religious duties. It was expected that the upbringing of daughters before their marriage should take place in the gynaeceum virtually in virginal seclusion. According to prevailing convention, women, married and unmarried were expected to be retiring and to have little contact with men. Furthermore, outside the gynaeceum, women were expected at all times to wear a veil. However, Byzantine historical sources show that strict conventions did not affect the scope of extra-

¹³⁷al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, p. 351.

¹³⁸al-Jāḥīz, *al-Hayawān*, Vol. VII, p.28

¹³⁹Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa*, Vol. I, p.157.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., p.167.

marital affairs and did not have in real terms the effect of preventing illicit contact between the sexes. There was thus a dichotomy in many cases between the ideal female behavior in principle and in practice. The ideals of theology, namely virginity, celibacy, and asceticism, seldom appear to have had any distinct influence upon Byzantine sexual relationships after the early centuries, though lip-service was often paid to the superiority of celibate life. Except for theologians, virginity and celibacy were not regarded generally as suitable alternatives to matrimony.¹⁴¹

In Islam the question of whether or not one should marry is resolved mostly in favor of marriage. The clear example of the Prophet himself established marriage and legal sexual intercourse in general as *sunna*, although celibacy crops up at intervals, especially among the Sufis.¹⁴² Al-Jāḥiẓ does express amazement at the Christian ideal of continence: the priests, monks, nuns, hermits, bishops and archbishops do not get married and have children. Indeed they are praised by the Christians for that. He acknowledges that the Christians are all monogamous and cannot divorce or have concubines.¹⁴³ Only in the case of adultery is the man allowed to divorce and then he can never remarry his wife.¹⁴⁴ In fact, Byzantine women hate the religion of the

¹⁴¹Lynda Garland, "The Life and Ideology of Byzantine Women: A Further Note on Conventions of Behavior and Social Reality as Reflected in Eleventh and Twelfth Century Historical Sources," *Byzantion* LVIII(1988), pp. 361-393.

¹⁴²James Bellamy, "Sex and Society in Islamic Popular Literature," *Society and the Sexes in Medieval Islam*, pp.22-42.

¹⁴³al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Radd 'ala al-Naṣāra*, pp. 221-2.

¹⁴⁴*Kitāb al-Bad' wa al-Tārīkh*, Vol. 4, p. 48.

Some Arab authors dwell on Byzantine women's sexual promiscuity. Sexual activity in Muslim society was, legally speaking, of two sorts: legal intercourse between a man and a woman, *nikāh*, which for a woman means intercourse with her husband only, for the man with his wives and his slave girls; and illegal intercourse, *zina*, which is often translated "adultery." Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār states that adultery is widespread in the Byzantine cities and markets: if the woman had no husband and chose not to marry and preferred adultery she was free do whatever she pleased. There are many markets for prostitutes who own their own shops and sit at their doors uncovered and conspicuous. If one of them gives birth to a child, she can carry him to the patriarch, bishop, or priest and say: "I am giving this child so that he may become a servant of Christ." And they respond: "You are a pure and blessed saint" and promise her requital.¹⁴⁶ The nuns in the monasteries go out to the fortresses and offer themselves to single men seeking God's face and they are thanked for such deeds.¹⁴⁷

One Arabic anecdote that reflects the morals of the Byzantines on marriage concerns a Muslim prisoner who had converted to Christianity and had married a well-off, beautiful Byzantine woman. The ex-Muslim prisoner lived happily with her until one day he was sent on a forty-day expedition during which he was informed that his wife had remarried. When he returned,

¹⁴⁵ Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa*, Vol. I, p.157.

¹⁴⁶ Abd al-Jabbār, *Ibid.*, pp.167-8.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.170-1.

he did not go home and soon his mother-in-law came to see him with a large escort of neighboring women all wearing expensive cloths and jewelry. His mother-in-law informed him that his wife did not remarry because as a *rūmīyya*, a Byzantine, she cannot have two husbands and that she has simply taken up a lover during his absence. The other women stood as witnesses to the fact that the man was only her lover for this was not objectionable or shameful in their eyes. The mother-in-law urged him to return and he did: "All who enter *bilād al-rūm* loose their jealousy and passion and allow their wives to take up lovers."¹⁴⁸

The Arab authors thus posit, on the one hand, the Byzantine ideals of virginity and celibacy¹⁴⁹ and, on the other hand, they indulge in describing the 'looseness' of Byzantine sexual behavior. There was in Byzantium a dichotomy in many cases between the ideal female behavior in principle and in practice. The Arabs failed to comprehend this internal contradiction between ideal behavior and actual practice. The ambivalence of the Byzantines led to an Arab incomprehension which was expressed in a negative attitude towards the personal characteristics of the Byzantines. In general this attitude was made easier to maintain by the inherent abstractness of the attributes.

By and large, the few rare statements on Byzantine women in

¹⁴⁸Ibid., pp.171-2.

¹⁴⁹Muslim polemists criticized these two points, see Theodore Khoury, *Manuel II Paleologue(1350-1425): entretiens avec un Musulman*, (Paris, 1966), pp. 82-8.

the Arabic sources are stereotypical. This is the case with the Byzantine persona in general which suffers from a one dimensional representation. Certain stereotyped occupations were not mere conventions but actually a reality of the Byzantine women's lifestyle: spinning and weaving in particular typified the role and occupation of Byzantine women. We find this reflected in the Arabic sources: "the Byzantine adorns himself with brocade cloth made by his wife, daughter or sister and he keeps it for twenty years."¹⁵⁰

One quality which was highly praised by the Arabs was courage; the Byzantines are often described as courageous and hard fighters. Even their women sometimes fight: during a battle, the wife of a Byzantine warrior carrying a pointed weapon behind her husband, attacked *Safwān Ibn al-Muattal*.¹⁵¹ The Arabs seemed to respect the Byzantines' fighting ability: Naturally, a fierce opponent increases the stature of the victors. A tenth century Arabic proverb states that if the Rum are not attacked first, they will launch the attack.¹⁵² Whatever the level of admiration for the Byzantines' fighting abilities, there is never an analysis of personalities; the Arab authors never spoke of these fighters' hopes and fears. This constitutes one of the conclusions of the study: the Arab writers do not depict the Byzantines as individuals either in their physical appearance or their mental make-up. The Byzantine does not appear as a three-

¹⁵⁰Ibn al-Farra, *Kitāb al-Rusul wal Mūlūk*, p. 37.

¹⁵¹Ibid. p.159.

¹⁵²Al-Maydānī, *al-Amthāl*, Ed. M. Abd al-Hamid, 1959, p. 305.

dimensional character and whenever he is allowed direct speech he is rather expressing the thoughts and biases of the Arab narrator.

BYZANTINE JUSTICE

The Arab authors directed their criticism at the Byzantine system of justice characterized as unjust and oppressive. The word most often used in such discussions is *zulm* which, in the Qur'ān has the broad definition of misdeed; in later time, it increasingly specialized in the sense of injustice and oppression. Byzantine behavior in Syria was outwardly cruel. The Byzantine officials were continuously drinking wine and committing adultery. The Christian inhabitants accused them of slaughtering their sheep and robbing them. However, the General of the Byzantine army in Syria, Vahan, is depicted as a honest man who was shocked by the actions of his officers and reprimanded them for their sinful behavior, especially at a time when the Arabs were killing their fellow soldiers and abducting their children. If the enemy wins, they will have only themselves to blame.¹⁵³

In *Futūh al-Shām*, al-Azdi has several explicit references to Byzantine injustice. Mu'ādh Ibn Jabal was sent by the Muslim commander Abu 'Ubāida Ibn al-Jarrāḥ(d.18/639) to confer with the Byzantines and was asked upon his arrival to sit with the Byzantine dignitaries. Mu'ādh refused to sit on the expensive carpets and pillows which, according to Mu'ādh, were

¹⁵³al-'Azdi, *Kitāb Futūh al-Shām*, pp.157-8.

appropriated from the poor and weak. Instead, he chose to sit on the floor.¹⁵⁴

Al-'Azdī provides a case of Byzantine erratic and unjust behavior. One of the great Byzantine commanders took some sheep belonging to a local Christian and his companions took the rest. The owner sent his wife and daughter to complain to the commander about the behavior of his men. However, instead of correcting the injustice, the women were raped and the son was killed for trying to interfere while the father's hand was cut off. Vahan, the general commander of the Byzantine armies in Syria, depicted as a good and just leader, was not able to give justice because all the commanders in his army supported such deeds.¹⁵⁵ Arab authors make a clear distinction between the behavior of the Byzantine commander which is noble and righteous and that of Byzantine rank and file of the army which is ruthless and unjust. Vahan, who was totally horrified by the situation, warned his officers that if they believed in a God that protects and gives justice to the oppressed, they should be sure of punishment. Only non-believers could perpetrate such actions, and like Pilate, Vahan declared himself innocent of their crimes.¹⁵⁶ Harūn Ibn Yahyā, who has left a description of Constantinople, mentions in the context of his description of the Byzantine Emperor's procession from the Palace to the Great

¹⁵⁴Ibid., pp.100-102.

¹⁵⁵Ibid., p.157.

¹⁵⁶Ibid., p.158.

Church a ceremonial connected with the question of justice. As the Emperor reaches the gate of the Church, he washes his hands and tells his minister: "I am innocent of the blood of all people. May God not hold me responsible for their blood because I place it on your neck." He then puts his robe on his minister, gives him the inkstand of Pilate and tells him: "Govern with justice as Pilate governed with justice." The minister is then carried in the streets of Constantinople while people are proclaiming: "Govern with justice since the Emperor has put you in charge of the affairs of his people."¹⁵⁷

Thus Arab authors have sharp criticisms of the Byzantine system of justice. Justice as a political and social ideal retained for Muslims a prominent place in the ideal political organization. The Qur'ān's concern with it reflects a strong feeling for justice as the natural and necessary basis of all human society.¹⁵⁸

The Arab writers also point to the thin substance of the Byzantine codes of law. Al-Bakrī states that the *diwān* of their jurisprudence upon which they rely for their judgements contains only 557 cases. Among these there are some cases which are meaningless and which do not require any exegesis.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Ibn Rustih, *Kitāb al-’Aflāq al-Nafīsa*, p.125.

¹⁵⁸ Franz Rosenthal, "Political Justice and the Just ruler," *Israel Oriental Studies* 10(1980) pp. 92-101.

¹⁵⁹ al-Bakrī, *Jughrāfiyat al-‘Andalus wa ‘Urūba*, Ed. A.al-Hajj (Baghdad, 1968), p. 208. That the Christians have no law was a favorite Muslim accusation. Leo III compiled his Eclogue which according to Crone was an instrument of Christian warfare against Muslims. Patricia Crone, "Islam, Judeo-Christinity and Byzantine Iconoclasm," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*,

Indeed these are cases which have never occurred and never will. Furthermore, al-Bakrī points out that their tradition is not taken from revelation or from a prophet but comes from their kings.¹⁶⁰ The Arab authors provide a contrast with the shari'a which is based on revelation, that is the Qur'ān and the Sunna, the tradition of the Prophet Muḥammad.¹⁶¹

Al-Bakrī accuses Byzantine justice of inequality as the nobles are given easy sentences while the more humble people are given harsh ones requiring them to sell their property.¹⁶² Among their rules is that if someone has intercourse with someone else's slave-girl in her master's house, he is punished but if this occurs anywhere else there are no punishments at all. If he has a son from her, the son is not admitted to certain positions such as that of priesthood and he does not inherit from his father if the father has a son from a free woman.¹⁶³ In the Byzantine Empire the slaves are freed after having served for seven years. As for their penal justice, the murderer is killed while the one who commits a murder by mistake has to leave the country. The

2(1980), pp. 59-95.

¹⁶⁰al-Bakrī., *Ibid.*, p. 207.

¹⁶¹In fact, Joseph Schacht thinks that the parallels between the Roman-Byzantine law and Muslim law are too numerous and important to be explained as coincidental. They were not limited to details but also included general concepts and fundamental principles and juridical law. There was no conscious adoption but what they borrowed were known and spread notions. "Droit byzantin et droit musulman," *Convegno di scienze morali storiche filologische*, Roma, accademia dei Leincei, 1957, pp.197-218.

¹⁶²al-Bakrī, *Jughrāhiyat al-'Andalus*, p. 206.

¹⁶³*Ibid.*, p. 207.

homosexual, the false witness, the gambler, and the alcoholic are all anathemized.¹⁶⁴

THE BYZANTINE VIEW OF THE ARABS: THE ARABIC SOURCES

By looking at how the Arabs distinguish themselves from the Byzantines we can isolate some facets of Arab identity. Certain passages in the Arabic sources contain views that the Byzantines had of the Arabs, or rather, the views that the Arabs thought that the Byzantines had of them. Before the Byzantines, the Persians had also spoken lightly of the Arabs: when the Arab Lakhmid Prince al-Nu'mān visited the Persian Court, he found there ambassadors from China, India, and the Turks as well as the brother of the Byzantine emperor. These fell into discussing the various merits of their respective nationalities. The Sassanian King Chosroes Parviz(590-628) describes the Arabs as poor, half-starved wretches.¹⁶⁵ For instance, unable to understand the causes of the Byzantine defeat in the face of the Muslim armies, Heraclius is said to have asked his generals: "Aren't those people human like you? Aren't you more numerous?"¹⁶⁶ What follows is a passage giving a description of the Arabs as supposedly perceived by the Byzantines. The characterization of the Arabs is positive and stresses the solidity and patience that only Islam

¹⁶⁴al-Balkhī, *al-Bad' wa-al Tārikh*, Vol. 4, p.48.

¹⁶⁵Browne, Edward. "Some Accounts of the Arabic Work Entitled 'Nihayati'l irab fi akhbari'l Furs wa'l Arab,' Particularly of that Part which Treats of the Persian Kings." *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*. April, 1900, pp.195-259.

¹⁶⁶al-'Azdī, *Kitāb Futūh al-Shām*, p.133.

could give them. They are a people who wake up during the night and fast during the day; they keep their promise; they command goodness and prohibit forbidden things and actions; they do not commit injustice and are fair to each other.¹⁶⁷ The other side of the coin is that in the eyes of the Arabs, the Byzantines have the opposite characterization, having none of these qualities: they are lazy, unfaithful, and unjust. Al-Azdi puts it in the mouth of a wise Byzantine: "We drink wine, we commit what is unlawful, we do not keep our promise and we commit injustice."¹⁶⁸ What is perhaps most significant in this passage and other similar passages is that, in these instances, the Byzantine is allowed to speak: "We never feared this nation. They came to us bare-footed, naked, and hungry. They were thrown out of their land by drought, and because of the arid soil and the generally bad conditions."¹⁶⁹ The Byzantine General Vahan told his troops not to be afraid of the Arabs for "their number is small and they are a people of poverty and misery and most of them are hungry and denuded."¹⁷⁰ The Arab author stresses the poor and difficult circumstances from which the Arabs arose only to indicate their even greater achievement in defeating the two great empires of the time, namely the Byzantine and the Persian empires. The passage also reflect the view that the Byzantines were wealthy and lived in much more favorable

¹⁶⁷Ibid., p.133.

¹⁶⁸Ibid., p.133.

¹⁶⁹Ibid., p.10.

¹⁷⁰Ibid., p.155.

circumstances. It was unthinkable that such a miserable and poor nation, that is the Arabs, could defeat a great and wealthy nation. Again, the commander of the Byzantine armies Vahan told the Muslim commander Khālid Ibn al-Walīd(d.21/642): "There is no nation which was less considered than yours for the majority are shepherds and are people of rocks and stones, of misery and suffering. All the great nations surrounding us fear us. You have caused great corruption, *fasād*. You sailed our ships and they are not like yours and you wore our cloths and they are not like yours...you ate from our food and it is not like yours and you took from us gold, silver and our sumptuous goods. Take it all and leave: we will give each one of your amirs 10,000 dinars ...on the condition that you do not return to our country."

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The Byzantine patrician of Damascus was amazed by the integrity of the Muslims who shared their booty equally. His patricians told him: "Yes indeed, they are monks during the night and abstainers during the day; if their kings steal, they have their hand cut off and if anyone commits adultery he is stoned...The great patrician answered: "if I were not afraid of the anger of the great king, I would ask them for peace so that I may be saved and enter their religion."¹⁷²

The inhabitants of Fihl told the Muslims: "You are more preferable to us than the Byzantines even though they are

¹⁷¹Ibid., pp.180-1.

¹⁷²Ibn al-'A am, Kitāb al-Futūh, Vol.1(Heydarabad, 1968), p.151. |

Christians, for you keep your promise, you are more just and better governors."¹⁷³ The defeated Byzantine armies leaving Fihl and reaching the Byzantine Emperor in Antioch compared themselves with the Muslims: they admitted that they, the Byzantines, lie and are impatient. Furthermore "We drink wine and commit unlawful deeds, *harām*, we revoke our promise, and we act unjustly."¹⁷⁴ Al-'Azdī also provides a comparison between the lands of the Byzantines and the Arabs and clearly shows the admiration which both the Arabs and the Byzantines held for Byzantine land. The Byzantines sent the following letter to Abu 'Ubaida: "Leave our country which produces wheat, barley, fruits, vine, dates, *al-thimār*: you are not worthy of it. Go back to your land, the land of misery and suffering." The Muslim commander Abu 'Ubaida Ibn al-Jarrāḥ was confirming that the Arabs' land is a land of suffering and misery but "God, who strengthens whomever He wishes, has exchanged it for us with the land of lofty living and the flowing rivers and the numerous fruits."¹⁷⁵

Another case in point is a passage in *al-Tanūkhī* where a Byzantine patrician denigrated the Arabs by saying that they lacked intelligence and culture and that their victory over the Byzantines was the result of their superior number and good organization. When the patrician of *Burgān*, who was well-versed in Arabic, interfered and said that the Arabs have culture,

¹⁷³Al-'Azdī, *Kitāb Futūh al-Shām*, p.197.

¹⁷⁴Ibid., pp. 132-3.

¹⁷⁵Ibid., pp. 99-100.

intelligence and good organization, the Byzantine Emperor answered: "You exaggerate in giving the Arabs qualities they do not have."¹⁷⁶ This passage upholds the image of the Byzantines as being cultured and organized. In fact it posits the Byzantines as judges with respect to other cultures and societies. The purpose of the passage is to defend Arabic culture. Nowhere is there a denial of the importance of the Byzantine civilization and cultural achievements.

In the early period when the Muslims had little administrative experience or administrative sophistication, they acknowledged their debt to the Byzantines and Persians. As models in their rule, administration, and protocol, the Byzantines in Arab eyes were only matched by the Persians. They borrowed Byzantine architectural techniques and used Byzantine artisans while the Byzantine position was also that of the equal enemy.

From the Muslim point of view there was a major qualitative difference between the war against the Byzantine Christians and the wars on the other frontiers of Islam. Among the peoples of the steppes and the jungles, even in the great civilizations of China and India of which they had limited knowledge or understanding, they saw no recognizable alternatives to Islam.¹⁷⁷ The struggle against Byzantium, in contrast, was against a rival religious and political system which challenged the very basis of the universal mission of Islam and competed with it in terms

¹⁷⁶ al-Tanukhi, *al-Faraj ba'da al-Shidda*, Ed. A. Al-Shalji (Beirut, 1978) Vol. 2, p. 203.

¹⁷⁷ Bernard Lewis, *Muslim Discovery of Europe* (Ontario, 1982), p. 66.

which were both familiar and intelligible. In Muslim writings, the Byzantine Empire becomes the House of War par excellence and the war against it is the very model and prototype of the *Jihād*. This was so because the Byzantine Empire was a major military adversary, a great cultural center, and also offered a religious alternative.¹⁷⁸

Thus, on the whole, the image that we get of the Byzantines from the Arabic sources is very variegated. Contempt is often confounded with admiration and one feels an uneasiness in dealing with the achievements of Byzantine civilization. There is often an intended denigration of their character and customs and a lot of attention mixed with praise for the power and wealth of the Byzantine Empire. The admiration of the Arab authors concerns mostly objects, architectural features, merchandise, textiles, and jewelry. The negative image has to do with basic cultural differences involving habits and customs. The state of ambivalence and sometimes ignorance is so widespread that the geographer Ibn Hawqal has to explicitly state that for many cultivated Muslim writers *bilād al-rūm* appears in a different light from what it really is: "Actually, its power is insignificant, its revenues mediocre, its population of humble condition, wealth is scarce, conditions are miserable. In fact the Byzantines are in

¹⁷⁸The same attitude and concerns were felt by the Byzantines. Patricia Crone states that "the distinctive feature of the Muslim threat to Byzantium was that it was at once conceptual and political...what the Byzantines had never experienced before was a monotheist attack on both their truth and power." In "Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm."

a precarious situation."¹⁷⁹ Mas'ūdī, on the other hand, states that the Byzantine Empire is still in possession of firmly established institutions and a highly organized administration.¹⁸⁰ The mixed image of praise and denigration is the expected outcome of a complex relationship of fascination and suspicion. It is thus difficult to conciliate the various statements and it is necessary to stress the ambivalence that predominates as one of the main themes of the Arabs' view of the Byzantines.

¹⁷⁹ Ibn Hawqal, *Kitāb Sūrat al-'Ard*, p. 200.

¹⁸⁰ al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbīh*, p. 7.

THE BYZANTINE EMPEROR

The Byzantine emperors loom relatively large in Arabic literature where they are mentioned in various contexts and roles: as leaders conducting campaigns, as recipients of Arab embassies, in the role of exchanging gifts and also, in various anecdotes, as wise men who give advice. Sometimes the descriptions and references are quite negative. This is particularly the case in violent exchanges of letters between caliphs and emperors. However, the references to Byzantine emperors are often neutral and, at times, even positive. This may be partly explained by regarding the Byzantine emperors as standing as a mirror to the actions, attributes and achievements of the Abbasid caliphs. The qualities of the Byzantine emperors which were deemed positive by the Arab authors were the same ones which a caliph ought to have. The negative qualities that the Arab authors highlighted with respect to the Byzantine emperors reflected two tendencies: on the one hand they were part of the perception of the Other, the Byzantine enemy; on the other hand, they may point to a certain subversive criticism of

caliphs seen as behaving in analogous ways.

THE POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES BEHIND CALIPH AND EMPEROR

The position of the Abbasid caliphs and the Byzantine emperors was grounded in different political ideologies, although, on a practical level, their position and power were similar. In terms of everyday reality the office of the caliph was shaped into one of a theocratic ruler that resembled the role of the emperor. In the early history of the Islamic community, the justification for this was that if a caliph did not look or behave like a Byzantine emperor, no one in the former Byzantine lands would take his office seriously.

The Byzantine emperor's role in the cosmic order was described by Eusebius of Ceasarea who expressed the belief that the emperor, like God, is an absolute monarch, the vicar of God on earth. There can thus be only one Christian emperor and one earthly Empire. In keeping with the Eusebian political ideal of the imperial image, the Byzantine emperors regarded themselves as rulers of the continuation of the unified Roman Empire. The Emperor was the only authority placed beyond any hierarchy dominating and controlling the life of the Empire in its most significant manifestations. The power he wielded was vast, unlimited and subject to no higher authority to which appeal could be carried.¹⁸¹ The *prooima*, the preambles to the imperial

¹⁸¹Milton Anastos, "Byzantine Political Theory: Its Classical Precedents and Legal Embodiment," In *The Past in Medieval and Modern Greek Culture*, Ed. Speros Vryonis (Malibu, 1978), pp.13-53.

edicts reflected the ideal portrayal of the emperor, the main elements of which were that imperial power derives from God, an idea interwoven with that of the emperor's love of God and imitation of God; that the emperor is concerned about his subjects; and that the emperor exercises justice and righteousness and dispenses bounty and philanthropy.¹⁸² Although contemporary Byzantine historians and chroniclers severely criticized their rulers, nevertheless, they regarded their sins and shortcomings as a deviation from the ideal image of the Emperor.¹⁸³ The magnification of the supreme power of the Basileus was also the main theme of Byzantine imperial art. In addition to biblical and mythological analogies, the symbolic images show the Emperor dominating people, receiving adoration and offerings, investing functionaries and presiding over church councils.¹⁸⁴

THE ARABS' UNDERSTANDING OF THE EMPEROR'S POSITION

Concerning the political position of the Byzantine emperors and their actual power, Ibn Khurdadhbéh realized the importance of the position of the Byzantine emperor and stated that "the

¹⁸²A. Kazhdan, "Certain traits of imperial Propaganda in the Byzantine Empire from the Eighth to the Fifteenth Centuries," *Predication et Propagande au Moyen age: Islam, Byzance, Occident* (Penn-Paris-Dumbarton Oaks Colloquia, III, 1980), pp.13-28.

¹⁸³A. P. Kazhdan and Giles Constable, *People and Power in Byzantium* (Washington, 1982), p.15.

¹⁸⁴André Grabar, *L'Empereur dans l'Art Byzantin* (Paris, 1936), p. 98.

Byzantine emperor has the greatest authority and respect. The emperor has full authority over war and taxation and he retains the power of the sword.¹⁸⁵ The Arabs knew that kingship in Byzantium was not hereditary: "There are no codes that regulate imperial succession; it is open to anyone, including women. Only strength counts."¹⁸⁶ The lack of familial succession to the throne was a significant limitation on imperial power. Sharaf al-Dīn Tāhir Marwāzī, writing in the eleventh century, claimed that Byzantine rulers who failed to achieve their ends were deposed and others elected in their place: "When the king has fought an enemy and come back in triumph and victory, his rank and position in the kingdom grow. If, however, he has been defeated and proved too weak, he is dismissed from kingship and has no share in it and someone else is appointed in his stead."¹⁸⁷ Abu Shujā' in his *dhail* relates the visit of a Muslim ambassador to the Byzantine Emperor Basil II (976–1025) in which he gave him the following advice: "Your majesty's first care should be to guard your person, next your sovereignty, and then, your partisans... The conclusion of peace between you and the first among men and ruler of Islam is not to the taste of your advisers. Now a man fails to realize only that of which he has had no experience, and you have had seven years' experience of

¹⁸⁵ Ibn Khurdadhbeh, *Kitāb al-Masālik wal Mamālik*, Ed. De Goeje (Leiden, 1967), p.109.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ Text and trans. in Vladimir Minorski, "Marvazi on the Byzantines."

revolt against yourself and your rule. Moreover, the continuation of the State does not imply your continued existence, for the Byzantines are indifferent as to who is the emperor over them."¹⁸⁸

In the Byzantine Empire, although state and church were joined in the person of the emperor, the demarcation between temporal and spiritual authority was blurred. The Arab authors were aware of the double authority of the Emperor and the Patriarch. In *al-Tanbih wal-'Ishrāf*, Mas'ūdī drew the distinctions between the authority of the Patriarch and that of the Byzantine emperor listing their respective responsibilities:

"The patriarch is the sovereign king of religion and as the emperor has the power of the sword, the patriarch has power over the See of Constantinople. The master of the See is the partner of the emperor: no one else is equal to the emperor and he is the only person in front of whom the emperor bows. He is the titulary of the throne of iron. The concerns of war expenditures, tax collection, and the payment of soldiers are the emperor's responsibility, whereas the money from the pious foundations for the upkeep of churches, monasteries, bishops, and

¹⁸⁸H.F. Amedroz, "An Embassy from Baghdad to the Emperor Basil II," *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, 1914, pp. 915-942. Emperor Basil II had to face for three years the rebellious movement of Bardas Sclerus who was acclaimed Emperor by his troops in 976 and gradually brought the whole of Asia Minor under his domination. Bardas was finally defeated and fled to the court of the Abbasid Caliph. Basil II then had to deal with his powerful great uncle. Thus, Basil II's real independence began only in 986. See George Ostrogoski, *History of the Byzantine State* (New Brunswick, 1969), pp. 229-300.

monks is the responsibility of the patriarch.¹⁸⁹ The patriarch is thus the head of the spiritual hierarchy which is a parallel and a double to the administrative hierarchy. Marwazi states that "all over the Rum is a man called the Patriarch who is the lord of the religion. The king exalts him and humiliates himself before him and does not oppose him in any of his affairs. In their eyes he ranks with the prophets. When he calls the king, the latter rises for him from his seat and sits below him, seeking his favor and submitting to all he bids or forbids."¹⁹⁰ Marwazi is giving the patriarch of Constantinople even more power than the emperor. Heraclius himself, supposedly, acknowledges the Patriarch's superior authority when he told Dihya who had brought him the letter from the Prophet Muhammad inviting him to Islam: "Alas I know that your master is a prophet sent by God and that he is the one we expect in our Book. However, I fear for my life from the Rum otherwise I would follow him. Go to the Patriarch Daghātir and tell him about your master for Daghātir is greater among the Rum than I am and his words count for more than mine."¹⁹¹ Of course, the problem that Heraclius was facing was a religious one and fell within the authority of the patriarch who provided the necessary legitimacy for any religious innovation. Nonetheless, the various opinions expressed in the sources reflect

¹⁸⁹ al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbīh*, pp.172-3.

¹⁹⁰ Vladimir Minorski, "Marvazi on the Byzantines."

¹⁹¹ *Sira of Ibn Hishām*, Trans. by Alfred Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad* (London, 1955) p. 656. The Patriarch in Constantinople during most of the reign of Heraclius was Sergios(610-638).

the ambiguous relationship between emperor and patriarch in the Byzantine Empire.

The Abbasid caliphs, on the other hand, were supposed to be continuing the egalitarian tradition of the Prophet and of his immediate successors, the *Khulafā' al-Rāshidūn*. The three principal branches of Muslim political theory, namely, the Sunni juristic rules of the Caliphate, the mirror of princes, and the philosophical theory of the ideal state agree that the proper social order requires a good ruler. In all three, the ruler symbolizes the integration of the orderly relation of human beings to the cosmos and to God. The ideal ruler is represented as ethical, just and God-fearing, but the unspoken motive for the composition of these literatures is that actual rulers are capricious, willful, self-serving and tyrannical.¹⁹² The jurists maintained the fiction of the consultatively chosen caliph. In *al-'Aḥkām al-Sultāniyya*, which is one of the most authoritative exposition of the Sunni political theory of the caliphate, Abul Ḥasan al-Māwardī(d.450/1058) states that the office of the caliph is filled by election.¹⁹³ The book of Abu Ḥāmed Muḥammad al-Ghazālī(d.505/1111) *Kitāb Naṣīhat al-Mulūk* [The Book of Counsel for Kings] stressed the importance of justice, the principal means

¹⁹²Ira Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*(Cambridge, 1988), pp.181-191.

¹⁹³H.A.R.Gibb, "Al-Mawardi's Theory of the Khilāfa," *Islamic Culture* XI, no.3(Hyderabad, 1937), pp. 291-302, and "Some Considerations on the Sunni Theory of the Caliphate," *Archives d'histoire du droit international* 3(1939), pp.401-410. Both Reprinted in his *Studies in the Civilization of Islam*(Princeton, 1962).

to realize it being that the ruler himself be a just person. Shiite doctrine was different in that the Imam as the deputy of God on earth, had superior knowledge and was divinely protected against error.¹⁹⁴ The manifestation of the Ismaili Fatimid ideology resembled that of the Byzantines and this is especially noticeable in the salutation. In both the Fatimid and Byzantine courts people had to prosterinate themselves, while the court in Abbasid Baghdad maintained traces of the old Arab repugnance for this form of salutation which was considered purely Byzantine.¹⁹⁵

A rigorous ceremonial presided over the Byzantine emperor's audiences and movements. Mu'ādh Ibn Jabal, was critical of the hierarchical structure of the Byzantine power structure and also of the great ceremonial that surrounded the emperors. He emphasized the sense of justice as a pre-requisite for legitimate rule, the absence of which disqualifying any ruler. Mu'ādh Ibn Jabal(d.18/639) told the Byzantines: "our king is one of us; he does not commit injustice or aggressions. If he does not obey God's

¹⁹⁴Patricia Crone and Martin Hind have tried to prove that originally, the Caliphate was both a political and religious institution and that the erosion of the caliphal ideal began in the Umayyad period and the process was completed under the Abbasids, leaving the Imamis as the sole adherents of the original conception. *God's Caliph* (Cambridge, 1986).

¹⁹⁵J.M. Hussey states that one of the most marked debts of Byzantine institutions was the Muslims' assimilation of the imperial ideal: "The Byzantine Conception of Imperial Majesty was reflected in the splendor of its buildings." In "Byzantium and Islam: Some Contacts and Debts in the Early Middle Ages," *Proceedings of the First International Conference of Bilād al-Shām*, April, 1974 (Amman, 1984), pp.75-88.

commands, we remove him..."¹⁹⁶ He expressed contempt towards the Byzantine emperors' oppression: "If your king is Heraclius, our king is God and our 'amīr is one among us whom we confirm only if he rules according to our Book and to the sunna of our Prophet. Otherwise, we remove him. If the 'amīr steals, his hand is cut; if he commits adultery, he is flogged; and if he curses a commoner, the commoner can curse him back. He is not removed from us, does not treat us haughtily and is just."¹⁹⁷ Mu'ādh was criticizing the Byzantine emperors for their aloofness from their people, their arrogance and their injustice as compared with Islamic rule which, in the earliest period, emphasized a strong sense of equality among all. More important, the caliph, unlike, the Byzantine emperor, was supposedly a simple mortal who was equal in all ways to any other Muslim. The Muslim commander Khalid ibn al-Walīd (d. 21/642) told the Byzantine commander Vahan: "Thank God who made the prince who rules us a man like us so that if he claims that he is our king, *malik*, we remove him and we do not see him as having any merit over any Muslim."¹⁹⁸ In later Islamic political ideology, the notion of equality among all Muslims and the justice of the caliphs remained the ideal that the earliest Muslim community had, supposedly, achieved. It is possible that the Arab authors, in opposing Muslim and Byzantine rule, were hinting at this ideal in order to contrast it with the

¹⁹⁶ Ibn al-'A tham |, *Kitāb al-Futūh*, Vol. I, p. 182.

¹⁹⁷ al-Azdī, *Kitāb Futūh al-Shām*, pp. 104-105.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

present state of affairs in the Caliphate; but it probably also was a genuine belief of a basic conceptual difference between the two political ideologies.

In the biography of the Prophet, the *Sira*, there is a story about the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius (610-641) who, having received the Prophet's invitation to Islam, gathered his generals to communicate the message and to know their opinion on the matter. He is said to have rejected the Prophet's message only after having consulted with his generals. Heraclius is thus depicted acting as if he were a tribal leader, calling together his patricians, listening to their protests, and then agreeing to their requests, although they were acting on the basis of purely personal feeling. This points to a central concept in the political thinking of the Arabs, namely that of the tribe. Although the Islamic body politic had grown in complexity, the Arabs still understood politics in terms of the pre-Islamic tribe and projected their own conception on the Byzantines.¹⁹⁹

The Arabic sources leave us with the image of the Byzantine emperor enjoying all the insignia of power, the throne of gold, the crown, the purple tunic, and the red shoes. He was surrounded by elaborate ceremonial and all the wealth of the Empire was reduced to him through alchemy.

¹⁹⁹See W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Political Thought*, (Edinburgh, 1968), pp.12-14.

TITLES AND TERMS THAT REFER TO AND/OR ADDRESS THE
BYZANTINE EMPEROR

Several titles and terms were used by the Arab authors to refer or address the Byzantine emperor. One title was that of Caesar and as it came without the definite article, *qaiṣar*, it was used like a proper name. The word *qaiṣar* does not occur in the Qur'ān but it is found in the *Sīra* of the Prophet, in *hadīth* collections and in historical and *'adab* works.²⁰⁰ Ibn Khurdadhbeh and Marwāzī state that the Byzantine king is also called *basili* or *basilos*.²⁰¹ In *al-Bad' wa al-Tārīkh*, it is stated that the title of the kings of Rum is either *caesar* or *heraclius*, *qayāṣira wa harāqila*.²⁰² The most common term used in the Arabic sources to designate the Byzantine emperor is *malik*, king, which in the Qur'ān and *hadīth* has a negative connotation conveying a suggestion of worldly authority. In the early Islamic centuries it was used as a term of condemnation to distinguish between the impious and arbitrary rule of worldly sovereigns and the divine rule of caliphs. So while the era of the Orthodox Caliphs was referred to as *khilāfa* symbolizing justice and piety, the reign of the Umayyads was called *mulk*, thus describing its oppression.²⁰³ The early Umayyads were accused by pious

²⁰⁰ Irfan Shahid, "Kaysar," *Encyclopedia of Islam* (New Edition), pp.839-40.

²⁰¹ Ibn Khurdadhbeh, *Kitāb al-Masālik wal-Mamālik*, p.109 and Marwāzī in Minorski, "Marvazi on the Byzantines."

²⁰² *al-Bad' wa al-Tārīkh*, Vol. 3, p.210.

²⁰³ Faruq 'Umar, *Buhūth fi al-Tārīkh al-'Abbāsi*, pp.220-4. See also Roy Mottahedeh, "Some Attitudes Towards Monarchy and Absolutism," *In The Eastern Islamic World of the Eleventh and*

Muslims of following the practice, sunna, of the Rum for the idea of their dynasty was seen as akin to Ceasarism, *qaisariyya*.²⁰⁴ It was only with the emergence of Persian political tradition that the notion and terminology of *mulk* acquired some respectability among Muslims.

The epithet *al-tāghya*, the tyrant, became one common way of referring to the Byzantine emperors. The term *al-tāghiya* had "A connotation of insolence and overweening pride, an equivalent of the Greek notion of hubris."²⁰⁵ A Muslim prisoner in the Byzantine Empire referred to the Byzantine emperor as such and described him as being "the greatest enemy of Islam and the Muslims."²⁰⁶ *al-Qādī al-Nu'mān*(d.363/974) refers to the

Twelfth Centuries, Israel Oriental Society #10, pp. 86-91.

²⁰⁴*al-Tawhīdī*, *Rasā'il*, III, ed. Kilani (Damascus, 1951), p.17.

Mu'āwiyya was the first to apply the dynastic principle successfully and it became the cornerstone of the Umayyad and Abbasid systems. Nonetheless, the jurists and traditionists regarded it as monarchical behavior foreign to Islam. I. Blay-Abramski, *From Damascus to Baghdad: the Abbasid Administrative system as a Product of the Umayyad Heritage* (Ph.D., Princeton, 1982), p. 62. Bernard Lewis states that in the Qur'an the word king is used for Pharaoh, "hardly a model of a good and just ruler." *The Political Language of Islam*(Chicago, 1988), p.55.

²⁰⁵Bernard Lewis, *The political Language of Islam*, p.97.

²⁰⁶*Al-Tanukhī*, *al-Faraj Ba'da al-Shidda*, Vo. 2, p.192. Qubāth Ibn Razin was one of the followers of the Prophet. He was taken prisoner during the reigns of either Constantine II(641-668) or Justinian II(685-95/705-711) or in the interval between the two reigns. Thus, the adventure took place between 661 and 705. See M. Canard, "Les Aventures d'un Prisonnier Arabe et d'un Patrice Byzantin à l'Epoque des Guerres Bulgaro-Byzantines," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 9-10(1956), pp.51-72

Byzantine emperor as *tāghiyat al-rūm*, the tyrant of the Rum, and also *tāghiyat al-Qustantīnīyya*, the tyrant of Constantinople.²⁰⁷ The Byzantine ruler was not only called tyrant, *al-tāghya*. In particularly hostile contexts he was also addressed as the Dog of the Byzantines, *kalb al-rūm*.²⁰⁸ There is thus a variety of titles and appellations that the Arab authors use in referring to the Byzantine emperors. While some, *kalb al-rūm* for instance, are plainly derogatory and insulting, both *malik* and *tāghiya* attempt at striking at the very legitimacy of the rule of the Byzantine emperors.

TRAITS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BYZANTINE EMPERORS

The image of the Byzantines and of their rulers tended to fluctuate with the military fortunes of the two states. The ruler's life and character were especially important in Byzantium, where the whole government centered on the person of the Emperor. The Arab authors' description of the traits and characteristics of Byzantine emperors provide insight as to the qualities of the good and just ruler in the Arabs' perceptions of the times. Thus, not only do we learn of the Arabs' perception of the Byzantine emperors but we also get an idea of some aspects of their vision of the ideal ruler. Unable to criticize their own rulers, the Arab authors could point to the right direction by

²⁰⁷ Al-Qādī al-Nu'mān, *Kitāb al-Majālis wal-Musāyarāt*, pp.166 and 176 respectively.

²⁰⁸ The Abbasid Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd sent a letter to Emperor Nicephorus I (802-811) calling him *kalb al-rūm*. See below.

criticizing the shortcomings of the Byzantine emperors or inversely, by praising their achievements and certain facets of their behavior.

In the Byzantine historical works, the list of imperial virtues included, righteousness or justice, piety, philanthropy, generosity, chastity, love of truth, intelligence.²⁰⁹ The most general and abstract characteristics of the Byzantine emperors are, perhaps, given in Ibn al-Farra's *Kitāb al-Rusul wal Mulūk*. The vizir al-Fadl Ibn Marwān, asked a Byzantine ambassador about his Emperor and the ambassador answered: "The Emperor expands his favors with generosity and unleashes his sword against his enemies. Therefore, the hearts of the people are united around him either out of hatred or out of love. He neither tyranizes his soldiers nor does he coerce his subjects. He donates gifts easily but is harsh with respect to exemplary punishment. Hope and fear are locked in his hand. As for his rule, the Emperor wards off injustice, curbs the oppressors and gives each one his rights. And so his subjects are divided into two groups: content and happy. His prestige among them is so great that he is imagined in their heart but their eyes are closed in awe at his sight."²¹⁰ The Caliph al-Ma'mūn(198-218/813-833) was

²⁰⁹Alexander Kazhdan, "The Aristocracy and the imperial Ideal," *Byzantine Aristocracy, IX to XIII*, ed. M. Angold (BAR International Series, 1984) pp. 43-57. Kazhdan states that in the early tenth century, Byzantine political thought had considerable reservations about chivalrous virtues such as military prowess and noble birth. These acquired a proper place in the eleventh century.

²¹⁰Ibn al-Farra, *Kitāb al-Rusul wal Mulūk*, p. 31-32. Also in Abu

so impressed by this description that he challenged al-Fadl Ibn Marwān to find an eloquent Arab orator who can describe anyone of the Orthodox Caliphs in such terms.²¹¹ The eloquence of the Byzantines was thus explicitly being praised. More important, the attributes given, reflect the qualities deemed praiseworthy by the Arabs. Supposing that these were the actual words of the the Byzantine ambassador, wishing to impress his Arab interlocutors, he listed qualities that the Arabs appreciated and held in high esteem, namely generosity, justice and a harsh determination against enemies and oppressors.

In 'Uyūn al-'Akhbār, Ibn Qutaiba mentioned that it used to be said that each Muslim ruler has an equivalent Byzantine ruler whether in energy or in wealth. The Byzantine ruler during the time of Caliph 'Umar(13-23/634-644) was the one who wrote down their *dawāwīn* and subjugated their enemy. Their ruler during the reign of Mu'āwiyya(41-60/661-680) resembled the latter in his resolutness and clemency.²¹² The first reference is to Emperor Heraclius while the second openly refers to Mu'āwiyya and perhaps because he is not able to praise him directly, writing as he was during the Abbasid period, he mentions Mu'āwiyya's qualities in conjunction with the qualities of the Byzantine emperor, another 'enemy' of the Abbasid Caliphate.

The Arab authors tried to relate their rulers to the Family of

Ishāq al-Ḥuṣarī, *Zahr al-Adāb*, ed. Z. Mubarak (Cairo, 1925), Vol. 1, p.188.

²¹¹Ibid.

²¹²Ibn Qutaiba, 'Uyūn al-Akhbār, (Cairo, 1925), vol.1, p.198.

Kings. This was the notion of a relationship between the rulers of the earth and the known hierarchy among princes. Caliph Yazīd III(d.126/744) is quoted to have said: "I am the son of Kisra and my father is Marwān; Caesar is my grandfather and my grandfather is the Khāqān."²¹³ Yahya al-Barmakī said that there are five kings in the world. The king of furniture is the king of China; the king of cattle is the king of the Turks; the king of money is the king of the Arabs; the king of the elephants is the king of India; the king of elixir is the king of the Byzantines.²¹⁴ A different classification is found in *Tabaqāt al-'Umam* of Sā'īd al-'Andalusī where the king of the Byzantines is called the king of the people because his subjects are the most handsome of all.²¹⁵ Mas'ūdī also has a classification which also calls the king of Rum, the King of men, *malik al-rijāl*, because "there is not on earth any people with a more perfect physiognomy or with more handsome faces."²¹⁶

²¹³al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Rusul wal Mūlūk*, Tertia Series, Vol. 2, p.1874.

²¹⁴Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, p.136.

²¹⁵Sā'īd al-'Andalusī, *Tabaqāt al-'Umam*, p.13.

²¹⁶al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, Vol. I, p.169 and also pp.189-190. For references to Chinese texts which have such classifications see Paul Pelliot, "La theorie des quatre fils du ciel," *T'oun Pao*, 22(1923), 2nd Series, pp.97-125 and Gabriel Ferrand, "Les grands rois du monde," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 6(1930-32), pp. 329-339. The Byzantines systematized a doctrine of a Family of Princes which reflected the political reality of the Middle Ages more faithfully than the theory of the Empire-Barbarian antithesis. This doctrine referred only to heads of government, no longer rating them as tyrants, but

The presence of the Byzantine emperors affected the Christian population living in the Muslim Empire. The Christians are worthy of respect, because they have a reigning emperor. Al-Jāhīz states that the Christians are honored because of the presence of the Byzantine emperors.²¹⁷ Unlike the Jews, who are on their own, the prestige and power of the Byzantine emperors guarantees even for the people beyond his lands due respect. According to al-Jāhīz the Byzantine emperor is honored because the Arabs, before the rise of Islam, used to go to *bilād al-shām*, that is Syria, for commerce and also used to send deputations to the Byzantine emperors; "The later generations follow the precedent and honor whomever their ancestors have honored."²¹⁸

A few Byzantine emperors were said to be familiar with the Qur'ān. Emperor Heraclius(610-641) wrote to Caliph 'Umar Ibn al-Khattāb(13-23/634-44) describing to him a palm tree based on a communication that his messengers sent him and he asked the Caliph whether it was this tree which shaded the Virgin.²¹⁹ The verse Heraclius was referring to occurs in *Sūrat Maryam* "and the birthpangs surprised her by the trunk of the palm tree."²²⁰

conferring on them the titles of son and friend of the basileus. See André Grabar, "God and the Family of Princes Presided over by the Byzantine Emperor," *Harvard Slavic Studies* 2(1954), pp.117-123.

²¹⁷ al-Jāhīz, *al-Radd 'Ala al-Naṣāra*, pp.312-13.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Shihāb al-Din al-Nuwayrī quoting the Muslim ambassador al-Sh'abi, *Nihāyat al-'Arab fi Funūn al-'Adāb* , Ed. Ahmad al-Zein (Cairo, n.d.) Vol.11, pp. 120-1.

We also find Mu‘awiyya(41-60/661-680) answering craftily, with the help of the Qur‘ān, to an enigmatic request by the Byzantine Emperor. He had asked the Caliph to send him a bottle that contains all kinds of things. Mu‘awiyya filled the bottle with water quoting the Qur‘ān: "And of water we fashioned every living thing."²²¹ Also an enigmatic letter by the Byzantine Emperor was written to Mu‘awiyya: "Tell me about the words, *kalima*, that God cherishes most and about his most honorable servants and about four things which have a spirit but were not formed in the womb and about the tomb which carries its dead and about the spot on earth which was struck by the sun only once and about the galaxy and its place in the sky and about the origin of the rainbow." Upon reading the letter, Mu‘awiyya said, "God's curse upon him! I do not know what all this is." It was Abdallah Ibn ‘Abbās(d.68/687), the greatest *faqīh* of this time, who explained it to him: "The first word that God cherishes most is 'There is no God but God'; the second one is 'God be Praised';...the third is 'Thank God'...the fourth is 'God is the Greatest and the fifth is 'there is no power and strength save in God'."²²² Ibn ‘Abbās, a cousin of the Prophet is the first great name in Qur‘ān exegesis. He was called *Habr al-‘umma*, the rabbi of the community, *tarjumān al-Qur‘ān*, the interpreter of the Qur‘ān and *al-bahr*, the Sea. Such was his reputation that all sorts on interpretations were falsely ascribed to him to gain

²²⁰*Surat Maryam*, XIX:23.

²²¹*Surat al-‘Anbiyā’*, XXI:31. Anecdote found in al-Mubarrad, *al-Kamil*, ed. M. Ibrahim and S. al-Sayyid (Cairo, n.d.), p. 296.

²²²Ibn Qutaiba, ‘*Uyūn al-Akhbār*, Vol. I, p.199.

acceptance for them.²²³ This charade attributed to the Byzantine Emperor presupposes a knowledge on his part that could only be disclosed by someone of the stature and knowledge of Ibn 'Abbās. The anecdote reflects a kind of competition between two empires that were fighting to demonstrate cultural and scientific superiority. In other anecdotes the emperor's knowledge of the Qur'ān is displayed through their correspondence with the caliphs. When al-Walīd(86–96/705/715) destroyed the Church in Damascus, al-'Akhram, that is Emperor Justinian II Rhinotmetus(685–695/705–711)wrote him: this *bai'a* was safeguarded by your predecessors. If they were right, you are wrong, if you are right, they were wrong." The Umayyad poet, Al-Farazdaq, answered the Emperor by quoting a *sūra*: "And we made Solomon to understand it and unto each we gave judgement and knowledge."²²⁴ 'Abd al-Malik(65–86/685–705) wrote the following to the Byzantine Emperor: "Don't you know that God has in each day and night 360 moments? may be he will give me mercy and he will remove any power you have over me." The

²²³His being the forefather ofthe Abbasids played some part in the attribution of a large number of traditions to Ibn Abbas. "Early Tafsir-A Survey of Qur'anic commentary up to 150 A.H.." *Islamic Perspectives: Studies in Honour of Mawlawia Sayyid Abu Ala' Mawdudi.* . Ed. Khurshid Ahmad (London, 1979), pp.135–145.

²²⁴*Surat al-'Anbiyā', 21:79.* In another version, the Byzantine Emperor is supposed to have written to al-Walid : "You have destroyed the church which your father had deemed better leaving. If your deed is right, then your father was mistaken; if your deed is wrong then you have opposed his wish." Ibn Qutayba, 'Uyūn al-Akhbār, Vol. I, pp.199.

King of Rum wrote back: "this is not from your nature or from that of your ancestors. Only a prophet from the house of the Prophet could have said it." Mas'ūdī states that indeed these were the words of Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya.²²⁵

The Arabic authors expected the Byzantine emperors to be familiar with Islamic canon-law, *shari'a*. Al-Qādī al-Nu'mān, one of the intimates of the Fatimid Caliphs al-Mahdī and al-Mu'izz, and one of the foremost jurist consultants and theologians of the Ismaili sect, states the Fatimid Caliph al-Mu'izz (341-365/953-975), told the Byzantine ambassador who asked him for a perpetual truce: "Religion and *sharia* do not permit a perpetual truce... It would be befitting of your master, the King, holding a position as he does, not to be unaware of such an important point in the law of those with whom he corresponds and not to ask for something which is inadmissible according to their law."²²⁶ In theory, there existed a permanent state of war between the Byzantine and Muslim worlds. This did not prevent the existence of peaceful relations and commercial and cultural exchanges. However, the Islamic Law of Nations, the *siyar*, which regulate relations with non-Islamic states, was designed for temporary purposes on the assumption that the Islamic state was capable of absorbing the whole of mankind.²²⁷ Caliph al-Mu'izz was

²²⁵ al-Mas'ūdī, *Muṭaṭj*, Vol. 3, p. 320. Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya was the son of 'Alī, the fourth Caliph and son-in-law of the Prophet. His mother was from the tribe of Banū Ḥanīf and Muḥammad was therefore not a direct descendant of the prophet. He was nevertheless proclaimed by Mukhtār Ibn Abi 'Ubaid not just as caliph but as *mahdī*.

²²⁶ Al-Qādī al-Nu'mān, *Kitāb al-Majālis wal Musāyarāt*, p. 367.

expecting the Byzantine Emperor to know Islamic Law and thus refrain from requesting "a perpetual peace," since this runs contrary to the Islamic conception of the world order.

The Arab authors mention some skills which were particular to the Byzantine emperors. Repeatedly, the Byzantine emperors are described as being great alchemists. Ibn al-Faqīh states that the King of Rum is the King of Elixir.²²⁸ In his *Mafātīh al-‘Ulūm*, The Key of the Sciences, Khawārizmī defines elixir as: the transformative ingredient, *al-dawā'*, which, when added to a melted body, turns it into silver or gold or renders it white or yellow.²²⁹ The famous ambassador ‘Umāra Ibn Hamza witnessed

²²⁷Majid Khadduri, *The Islamic Law of Nations*(Baltimore, 1966) p.5. Fathi Othman says that the purposes were not temporary: they were meant to formulate the State's practices and legal rules which were sometimes very theoretical and impractical although sometimes they might be inclined to codify or legitimize the status quo. See also M. Hamidullah, *The Muslim Conduct of State*(Lahore, 1961).

²²⁸Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, p.136.

²²⁹Khawārizmī, Abu Abdallah, *Kitāb Mafātīh al-‘Ulūm* ed.C.Van Vloten (Leiden,1895)p.265. The date of the composition of the work is shortly after 977. His aim was to compile an encyclopedia of technical terms. See C. E. Bosworth "A Pioneer Arabic Encyclopedia of the Sciences: al-Khawarizmi's Keys of the Sciences," in *Medieval Arabic Culture and Administration* (Variorum Reprints, London, 1982) #1. Ibn Khaldūn has two chapters in his *Muqqadima* to alchemy: 'fī ‘ilm al-kīmiyā'. He defines alchemy as the studying of the matter with the intermediary of which the generating of gold and silver is achieved. See George Anawati,"La refutation de l'alchimie par Ibn Khaldun," *Mélanges d'Islamologie*(Leiden, 1974), pp. 6-18.

an important experiment in alchemy performed by the Byzantine Emperor.²³⁰ The Byzantine Emperor was thus in possession of supernatural knowledge and this magical power was at the basis of the Byzantine Empire's wealth.

The Byzantine Emperors were also skilled at predictions: "This is part of the science of prevision which the Byzantine emperors have inherited from their ancestors."²³¹ Emperor Phocas(602-610) predicted to Mu'awiyya who was then governor of Syria that the Muslims will unite to kill Caliph 'Uthmān(23-35/644-656) and that the rulership will revert to Mu'awiyya.²³² This prediction, of course, came true with the murder of Caliph 'Uthmān in 656, "an assassination which was one of the most traumatic incidents in early Islamic history."²³³ The Arab authors attributed these supernatural gifts to the Byzantine emperors without doubting or challenging them.

ARAB LISTS OF THE BYZANTINE EMPERORS

The Arabs' knowledge of the political and religious history of the Byzantine Empire consisted often in providing a list of the Byzantine rulers. Al-Ṭabarī records such a list and includes the names of the Byzantine Emperors from the beginning of the Christian era to the time of the Prophet and mentions the duration of their reigns. Al-Ya'qūbī records the names of the

²³⁰Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, p.139.

²³¹al-Mas'ūdī, *Mu'āj*, p. 54..

²³²Ibid.

²³³Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphate*(London, N.Y., 1986), p.73.

non-Christian and Christian rulers of Macedonia and Byzantium. Hamzah al-İsfahānī(d.after 350/961) records the names of the kings of Rum and the duration of their rule, not differentiating or distinguishing between Macedonia, Rome and Byzantium. The most detailed account is given by Mas'ūdī who distinguishes three main phases in the history of al-Rum: the period of the *hunafā*, the pagan Roman emperors with their capital in Rome which ends with the reign of Diocletian(284–305); the period of the Christian Roman Emperors of Constantinople starting with the reign of Constantine the Great(324–337)and up to the reign of Heraclius(610–641); the third phase covers the Byzantine emperors after the rise of Islam. Several Muslim historians attempted to synchronize the reigns of successive Byzantine emperors with those of their contemporaneous Muslim caliphs thus acknowledging their appreciation of the political, cultural and administrative importance of Byzantium. Mas'ūdī states in *Tanbih* that "The Empire of the Rum is still to our own times in possession of firmly established institutions and highly organized administration. So we did not wish to omit its history from our book."²³⁴

CONSTANTINE THE GREAT(324–337) and HELENA

The Arab authors point to the foundation of the Byzantine Empire's new capital, Constantinople, and to the acceptance of Christianity as a watershed in the history of the Roman Empire. They link the two events with Emperor Constantine the

²³⁴al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbih*, p.7.

Great(324-337). Within the Byzantine tradition, Constantine the Great was The Emperor and his activity was surrounded by legend, even during his own life time.

Various Arab authors state that the first king who became Christian was Constantine.²³⁵ He was the first to have settled in Byzantium which came to be called Constantinople.²³⁶ The author of *Kitāb al-Bad' wal-Tārikh* analyzes the epithet of Constantine, *al-muẓaffar*, the victorious one, and says that its roots is from *yadhfur* and not from *zafr*, victory, as it is not befitting an impure infidel to be called victorious.²³⁷ The author was keen on rejecting the use of the epithet victorious in conjunction with the name of a Byzantine emperor who, by this time, was the infidel par excellence and the main enemy of Islam.

There are two versions of the vision of Constantine, one preserved in Eusebius and the other in Lactanius. According to Eusebius, Constantine and his army saw a cross of light bearing the inscription: "with this sign conquer" in the sky, above the sun, shortly before noon. That evening, Constantine had another apparition with Jesus commanding him to fashion a cross for protection against his enemies. The next morning a standard made of gold and precious stones was made: the Labarum.²³⁸

²³⁵ al-Bairūnī, *al-Athār al-Bāqiyā fī al-Qurūn al-Khāliya*, Ed. Eduard Sachau (Leipzig, 1923) p. 95

²³⁶ Ibid, p. 299 and al-Mas'ūdī, *Muṣṭafā*, Vol. 2, p. 734. Hamzah al-İsfahānī, *Kitāb Tārikh Sini Muṣṭafā al-'Arḍ wa al-'Anbiyā'*, ed. I.M.E. Gottwaldt (1844), p.73.

²³⁷ *al-Bad' wa al-Tārikh*, Vol. 3, p. 210.

²³⁸ Timothy Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, 1981),

Lactanius states that on the night before the battle, Constantine had a dream in which he was directed to have the Caeleste Signum Dei inscribed on his soldiers' shields.

In general, the Arab authors were aware of the Christian stories of Constantine's conversion. Mas'ūdī relates the following: While Constantine was engaged in a war against the King of Burgan he saw in his dream a glowing cross in the sky and the sound of a voice saying: "Have victory with it against your enemy." Mas'ūdī states that others say that Constantine saw the Cross while he was awake.²³⁹ Mas'ūdī's accounts do not correspond to the story of the conversion as stated by Eusebius but they come close to the one found in Lactanius. Lactanius' account represents perhaps the true course of events providing the "best information on Constantine's vision" while the Eusebian story is more strictly imperial propaganda.²⁴⁰ Ya'qūbī states that the reason for Constantine's Christianization was that he was fighting a war and he saw in his dream lances sent from heaven having crosses on them. In the morning, Constantine carried crosses on his lances and was victorious.²⁴¹ Mas'ūdī provides also a different reason for Constantine's Christianization: Constantine was suffering from leprosy and had to give up his office because it was a principle in the religion of the pagans and

p.43.

²³⁹ al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbih*, p.138.

²⁴⁰ Micael de Maio, J. Zeuge and Natalia Zotov, "Ambiguitas Constantiniana" The Caeleste Signum Dei of Constantine the Great," *Byzantion* 48(1988)*2, pp. 333-360.

²⁴¹ Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*(Beirut, 1960), Vol. I, p.153.

a duty of their cult that such a person was deemed unfit to rule. As the Christians did not have such limitations, Constantine maneuvered out of this situation by sending several army corps against the enemy placing them under the protection of the pagan gods and their object of cult. These troops were weak and returned defeated. The result was a contempt for the pagan idols and a degradation for whoever worshiped them. Constantine was consequently able to switch to Christianity relatively easily and remain in power.²⁴² This interpretation implies that Constantine was never a sincere Christian and pretended to accept the new faith for purely personal political benefits.²⁴³

Many Arab authors mention the First Ecumenical Council of

²⁴²al-Mas'udi, *Tanbih*, pp.137-8.

²⁴³ Constantine has always been a controversial figure. Modern interpretations indulge in a large spectrum of views both on the religious plane and on his abilities as a statesmen. Three interpretations of the conversion have dominated historical literature: 1- that Constantine was never a sincere Christian and pretended to accept the new faith for purely political reasons. (Jacob Burkhardt, *The Age of Constantine the Great*, Random House, 1949, pp.292-306 and Henri Gregoire, "La conversion de Constantin, *Revue de l'Université de Bruxelles* 36(1930), 231-272). 2- That he considered the Christian God merely another member of his syncretic pantheon which was devised to support his claim to universal monarchy (Andre Piganiol, *l'Empereur Constantin* (Paris, 1932), pp.48-75. And Jacques Moreau, "Sur la vision de Constantin" *Revue des Etudes Anciennes* 55(1953), 307-333). 3- That his conversion to Christianity was genuine and subsequently determined his religious policies (Andreas Alföldi, *The Conversion of Constantine and Pagan Rome*, trans. by H. Mattingly, Oxford, 1948, and A.H.M. Jones, *Constantine and the Conversion of Europe*, 1948). See John Eadie, *The Conversion of Constantine* (New York, 1977).

Nicaea in 325 but project a different understanding of it. *Mas'ūdī* states in *Muraqj al-Dhahab* that following his victory, Constantine returned to Nicaea and asked the experts about the sign of the cross. 318 bishops convened and explained to him the Christian religion.²⁴⁴ Thus, this Council which aimed at defining the doctrine and discipline of the Church and was especially concerned with the Arian doctrine, was turned by *Mas'ūdī* into a preliminary meeting which convened immediately after that victory, and where the Byzantine Emperor was being tutored on the basic precepts of Christianity. In fact, Constantine was at the time of the Council of Nicaea aware of the Christian differences, and he called the meeting in order to unify the dogma. He participated in the debates as a leader and was able to exercise considerable influence on its decisions. In his later work, *al-Tanbih wa al-'Ishrāf*, *Mas'ūdī* was much better informed and, referring to the Council of Nicaea, he stated that Arius was anathemized there. The Creed was also established and the bishops agreed to celebrate Easter on the Sunday following the Jewish Easter and made sure that the two feasts would never coincide. *Mas'ūdī* mentions the most important decisions of the Council: the twenty canons dealt primarily with questions of liturgical practice and problems of discipline and penitence. The meeting, *Mas'ūdī* states correctly, took place in the nineteenth year of the reign of Constantine.²⁴⁵

Hamzah al-'Isfahani also states that in the nineteenth year of

²⁴⁴al-Mas'ūdī, *Muraqj*, p. 43.

²⁴⁵al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbih*, p. 142.

his rule Constantine gathered 312 bishops in Nicaea in order to lay down the laws, *sharā'i*, of Christianity. After this council, all the Byzantines became Christians.²⁴⁶ Thus, for 'Isfahānī, the conversion of the population of the Byzantine Empire was instantaneous; he ignores the long period of transition required for such changes to take place. For Ya'qūbī, the reason for the meeting of the 318 bishops and the four patriarchs of Alexandria, Rome, Antioch and Constantinople was that "Christianity held a place in Constantine's heart and as he studied it, he found thirteen different doctrines."²⁴⁷ Yaqūbī also gives the text of the *Credo*.

Whereas Mas'ūdī, Ya'qūbī, Hamzah al-Isfahānī and others attempted to explain the reasons for Constantine's conversion to Christianity, another Arab author, the judge 'Abd al-Jabbār, denied the very act of conversion of the first Christian Emperor. He was one of the Muslim thinkers who accused the Apostles and early disciples of Jesus of having corrupted his message. According to 'Abd al-Jabbār, Constantine worshiped Christ and the Cross only publicly, leaving the religious practices of the Romans as he found them. Constantine abolished idolatry and introduced the belief in Christ. Everything else remained the same. It was not very hard to believe in Christ since the Rum had believed in the stars.²⁴⁸ 'Abd al-Jabbār stated that the Nicaean Creed was imposed upon the subjects and those who

²⁴⁶ al-Isfahānī, *Tārīkh Sīnī Mūlūk al-'Ard*, p.74.

²⁴⁷ Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, Vol. I, pp.153-4.

²⁴⁸ 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa*, p.162.

rejected it were killed: indeed, those who followed the true religion of Christ were persecuted, forced to venerate the Cross, eat pork and follow the religious practices of the Romans. Constantine closely examined the business and claims of the Philosophers and having found that their claims were false, he started to kill them, burning their books and destroying their temples. Not a single philosopher was left in Athens which was the City of Philosophers. The only survivors there were the peasants, the tanners and the dyers. The temples were converted to churches and filled with monks and all the books of philosophy and medicine were burned.²⁴⁹ 'Abd al-Jabbār's account is anachronistic and is part of the Muslim polemical literature which accuses the Christians of having deviated from true Christianity. Furthermore, 'Abd al-Jabbār accused Constantine the Great of having persecuted the philosophers in Athens. In fact, it was Emperor Justinian(527-65) who closed the famous philosophic school in Athens in 529 and from that time onward Athens lost its former importance as a cultural center and deteriorated into a second rate city.²⁵⁰

Religion apart, 'Abd al-Jabbār admired Constantine's rule and quoted the Rum as saying that Emperor Constantine was an energetic and strong ruler: "he holds among them a position similar to the one which Ardashir, son of Babek holds amongst the Persians."²⁵¹ Ardashir(d.241) founded the Sassanid dynasty

²⁴⁹Ibid., p.161.

²⁵⁰A. A. Vasiliev, *History of the Byzantine Empire*(Wisconsin, 1978), Vol. I, p.150.

in the third century and later Sassanian tradition, reported mainly in Arabic sources, traces the beginning of all institutions of church and state back to him.²⁵² He thus provides for the Arab Muslim authors a natural parallel to Constantine. 'Abd al-Jabbār was not the only Arab author who made this parallel. Mas'ūdī states that his history of the Byzantine emperors starts with the reign of Constantine just as that of the Persian kings starts with the reign of Ardashir.²⁵³ Abd al-Jabbār refers to Constantine's statesmanship saying that the Emperor was a cunning man who considered with patience the policies to follow and took the business of ruling his subjects most seriously.²⁵⁴

The author of *al-Bad' wa al-Tārīkh* credits Constantine for being the first emperor since Alexander the Great to move against the Persians.²⁵⁵ The history of the Byzantine Empire is often viewed as the continuation of that of Ancient Greece and within this unbroken historical process a parallel was made between Alexander and Constantine. In the Byzantine tradition, Constantine the Great was a popular model held out to later emperors. The formula 'The New Constantine' could be applied to any ruler.²⁵⁶

251 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa*, p.162. Masudi also provides the parallel between Ardashir and Constantine in his *Tanbih*, pp.136-7.

252 Richard Frye, *The Heritage of Persia*(London, 1962), p. 211.

253 al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbih*, p.137.

254 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt Dalā'il-Nubuwwa*, p.161.

255 al-Balkhī, *al-Bad'wa al-Tārīkh*, Vol. 3, p. 210.

256 A. Kazhdan, "Constantin imaginaire: Byzantine Legends of the Ninth Century about Constantine the Great," *Byzantion* 57(1987),

Closely tied to Emperor Constantine the Great was his mother Helena. Mas'ūdī analyzed the letters of her name: In Greek, the letters of her name are five. He points that the Byzantines do not have the letter 'h' and so the first one is an 'imāl -the pronunciation of a shaded towards e-and its numerical value equals five. The second letter is 'l' and equals thirty. The third is an *imāla* and equals five, the fourth in an 'n' and equals fifty and the fifth is an 'i' and equals ten. The total numerical value of her name is of one hundred.²⁵⁷

'Abd al-Jabbār recounts how the father of Constantine having heard of a woman of Harrān named Helena, examined her and married her. Helena was a Christian and as she gained his favors, she requested him to strengthen the Christians and benefit them. She brought a group of monks and asked her husband to take notice of their weakness and poverty. He felt pity and compassion and strengthened and defended them and consolidated their position.²⁵⁸

pp.196-250. In the Byzantine Empire, the Constantine legend, according to Kazhdan, became very popular in the 8th and 9th centuries. After the tenth century, the legend's development stopped. The main points of the legend were set in the ideological struggle of the epoch.

²⁵⁷al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, Vol. 2 , pp.41-42. The original idea of numerological procedures was that of transferring a person into a number by using the numerical values of its letter of the alphabet. This procedure existed in Greek Hellenistic texts. See O. Neugebauer and G. Saliba, "On greek Numerology," *Centaurus* 3 (1989), pp.189-206.

²⁵⁸'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbit Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa*, Vol.I, p.159.

Mas'ūdī talks about the further religious activities of Helena. She visited Jerusalem where she found the true Cross. She adorned it with gold and silver and consecrated the anniversary of this discovery by a feast of the Cross on the fourteenth of September.²⁵⁹ Mas'ūdī accredits Helena with the building of every single church in Syria, Egypt and *bilād al-rām*. Her name is engraved along with every cross in every church she built.²⁶⁰

HERACLIUS(610-641)

Heraclius(610-641) is mentioned in a wide variety of contexts and settings in the Arabic sources. Heraclius had ascended the throne following the revolt against Emperor Phocas(602-610). He was a gifted emperor and has been praised by many Byzantinists, notably by G. Ostrogorski, who wrote that "Heraclius was one of the greatest rulers in Byzantine history," and that "the age of Heraclius marked a cultural as well as a political turning point in the history of East Rome."²⁶¹

At the time of Heraclius' accession, the Persians were menacing the Byzantine Empire from the East. In 611 the Persians undertook the conquest of Syria and they captured Antioch, the main city of the eastern Byzantine provinces, and later on, Damascus. In 614 Jerusalem was captured and pillaged. The

²⁵⁹al-Mas'ūdī, *Muruj*, Vol. 2, p.41. And al-Isfahānī, *Tārikh Sīnī* *Mulūk al-'Ard*, p.74.

²⁶⁰al-Mas'ūdī, *Muruj*, Vol. 2, pp. 41-42.

²⁶¹G. Ostrogorski, *History of the Byzantine State*, pp.92 and 106.

tragedy was deepened by the transportation of the Holy Cross to Ctesiphon. Heraclius conducted his Persian campaigns between the years 622 and 628. In 627 he defeated the Persians completely near Nineveh; the Persian king Chosroes was dethroned and killed and peace negotiations with his successor gave back to the Byzantine empire the provinces of Syria, Palestine and Egypt and also the relic of the Holy Cross.

The Persian-Byzantine wars of this period are mentioned in sūra thirty in the Qur'ān, sūrat al-rūm: "The Greeks have been vanquished in the nearer part of the land; and, after their vanquishing, they shall be victors in a few years. To God belongs the Command before and after, and on that day the believers shall rejoice in God's help; God helps whomsoever He will; and He is All-mighty, the All-compassionate."²⁶² Heraclius is specifically mentioned within the context of these verses by some major Qur'ān commentaries especially later ones such as *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Ādhīm* of Ibn Kathīr and al-'Alūsī's *Rūh al-Ma'āni* and also in the *Majma' al-Bayān* of Abu al-Fadl al-Tabarī which is one of the most important Shiīte commentaries. However, all these fall outside our period-limit sources.²⁶³

262 "Sūrat al-Rūm," 30:1-5.

263 In *Rūh al-Ma'āni*, al-'Alūsī states that when Heraclius became aware of the extent of Persian destruction of *bilād al-rūm*, he cried and implored God to save the Byzantines. He then dreamt for several nights that Chosroes was brought to him with a chain on his neck while Heraclius heard a voice that was telling him to hurry to fight the Persian king because he will be victorious. Heraclius, thus, gathered his soldiers and headed from Constantinople to Nesibin and he defeated the Persians. Ibn Kathīr, in his *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Ādhīm*, praises Emperor

Tabari related Heraclius' accession to power and his subsequent triumph over the Persians: The Rum killed Emperor Phocas (602-610) because of what they saw of his immorality and his insolence towards God and his bad administration. They replaced him with Heraclius who, seeing the extent of the destruction by the Persian soldiers and the number of prisoners and the booty they took, cried and implored God to save him and save his people from the Persian soldiers. Heraclius saw in his dream a great man sitting on an exalted seat and another man entering and removing the great man from his seat and telling Heraclius: I have delivered him to you. Heraclius did not tell anyone of his dream but he saw again a similar dream whereby the man who entered threw a chain around the neck of the seated man and told Heraclius: I have delivered to you Chosroes himself so go and defeat him because victory is for you. Having seen these dreams repeatedly, Heraclius consulted with his patricians and advisors who told him to march. Heraclius won and it is said that the verses in *sūrat al-rūm* came down on this occasion.²⁶⁴

Heraclius in the highest terms: Heraclius was one of the wisest men and among the most energetic, shrewdest and deepest. He ruled the Byzantines in a great leadership. Al-Tabarī mentions that the Emperor of the Byzantines, following his victory over the Persians, walked to Jerusalem in gratitude for his victory.

²⁶⁴al-Tabarī, *Tārikh al-Rusul wal-Mulūk*, Prima Series, II, pp. 1003-5. Dreams served as a screen on which past history was projected; unable to write it, the chroniclers used the dream as a subterfuge for telling it. The kind of dream which Heraclius had, consecrating his triumph, occurs frequently in Islamic literature. See Toufy Fahd, "The Dream in Medieval Islamic Society," and G.E.

Referring to the same events, Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhri recounts in *Sīrat Ibn Hishām* the following story: "I [Ibn Shihāb] went with a number of Quraish merchants to Syria. We got there when Heraclius had defeated the Persians and had driven them out of his territory and had recaptured from them his Great Cross which the Persians had plundered. Heraclius then came out from Hims, Emessa, by foot and walked to the Holy city in gratitude for God's help. Carpets were spread for him and aromatic herbs were thrown on the carpets. Once he reached Ilya, Heraclius prayed, together with the nobles of the Rum."²⁶⁵ Al-Dinawarī states that the victory mentioned in *sūrat al-rūm* was the victory of Heraclius over the previous emperor Phocas.²⁶⁶

Ṭabarī states that soon after, however, "Heraclius was distressed because he saw in his dream that the kingdom of the circumcised was coming.... A messenger with insight brought a bedouin who was relating strange events happening in his country: a man from our midst claims to be a prophet and people have followed him and believed him. Some did not and there were battles among them in many places...Heraclius ordered to remove the man's cloth and he proved to be circumcised. Heraclius said: "this is by God what I saw in my

Von Gruenebaum, "Introduction: The Cultural Function of the Dream as Illustrated by Classical Islam," both in *The Dream and Human Societies* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966), pp. 351-364 and 3-22 respectively.

²⁶⁵al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Rusul wal-Mulūk*, Prima Series, III, 1562.

²⁶⁶al-Dinawarī, *Kitāb al-Akhbār al-Tiwal*, p.106.

dream.²⁶⁷ In a different story, Heraclius ordered his chief of police to find him a man of the Prophet's people. Heraclius had seen in a dream that the kingdom of a circumcised man was to be victorious. Not knowing about the new community of Islam, his patricians advised him to send orders to behead every Jew in his dominion.²⁶⁸

Heraclius is mentioned at length in the context of the Prophet's Muhammad diplomatic activities. The Byzantine Emperor was the recipient of a letter from the Prophet Muhammad in which he was asked to convert to Islam. The text of the letter is found in several works:

"In the name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate. From Muhammad the servant of God and his messenger to Heraclius the great leader of the Rum. Peace on whoever follows the right path. I invite you to Islam: become Muslim and you shall be safe. Become a Muslim and God Shall bestow on you a double recompense. If you turn away, the sins of the *arisiyyin*²⁶⁹ will fall upon you. And Oh people of the Book come towards an utterance which is the same for both of us: that we worship only

²⁶⁷Ibid., p. 1561.

²⁶⁸This is reminiscent of the New Testament story where Herod "slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coast thereof, from two years old and under." *The Gospel of St. Matthew*, II, 16.

²⁶⁹Armand Abel interprets this word as referring to the kings who in Israel rejected the warnings of the Prophets. "L'étranger dans l'Islam classique," *L'Etranger, Recueils de la société Jean Bodin*, 9(1958), pp. 331-351. The word is also translated to mean peasants and sometimes to mean Arians.

God and do not associate with him anything and that no one among us takes the other as lords, 'arbāb, outside of God. If they turn away you will say: witness that we are Muslims."²⁷⁰

The letter was very similar in its phrasing and content to other letters which the Prophet had sent to other rulers of his time. ²⁷¹ A letter of the Prophet arrived bidding the Persian king

²⁷⁰Text of letter in M. Hamidullah, *al-Wathā'iq al-Siyāsiyya li al-'Ahd al-Nabawi wa al-Khilāfa al-Rāshida* (Beirut, 1969), pp. 80-82. Hamidullah gives a detailed list of the sources in which this letter is found and he gives the variances. French translation of the letter in Hamidullah, *Documents sur la Diplomatie Musulmanne à l'Epoque du Prophète et des Caliphes Orthodoxes* (Paris, 1935), p. 20. There has been a controversy concerning the authenticity of this letter. Hamidullah discusses this controversy and tries to prove the authenticity of the letter in his "La lettre du Prophète à Heraclius et le sort de l'original," *Arabica* 2(1955), pp. 97-110. The authenticity of the letters of the Prophet Muhammad to Emperor Heraclius, to the Persian King Chosroes, to the Negus of Abyssinia and to others transmitted by the early historians, have been a subject of controversy. While Muhammmad Hamidullah believes in the authenticity of the letter of the Prophet to Heraclius, R.B. Serjeant considers all the letters forgeries designed to promote the notion that the Prophet conceived of Islam as a universal religion and also to strengthen the Islamic position against Christian polemic. Here again the belief of the Muslims in the authenticity is sufficient for the purpose of uncovering their mentality and convictions. In 1977, King Husain Ibn Talal of Jordan announced in a T.V. broadcast that the letter is now in his possession, the specialists having confirmed its authenticity. The news circulated in the Arab and Islamic world testifying to the hold of history on peoples' minds and to the legitimizing power that such a document still holds. See Shaikh Muhammad Mahdi Shams al-Dīn, "Ba'da Ḥusūl al-Malik Ḥusain 'ala al-Naskha al-'Aṣliya li Risālat al-Nabī 'ila Hirqil," *al-Usbū' al-'Arabi* 25/4/1977, #920, p.30.

²⁷¹Ibn Fadlallah al-'Umari, secretary of the Egyptian chancellery around 1347 was reassured by the ambassador of Spain that the

to embrace Islam or do battle. Khusraw Parviz, infuriated at this letter tore it apart and wrote to his governor in Yaman ordering him to march on Madina, fight Muhammad, take him prisoner and send him to the Persian capital.²⁷² In contrast, Heraclius is said to have read the letter and then placed it between his thighs and ribs. Heraclius supposedly wrote back to the Prophet a letter in which he acknowledged the Prophet as the messenger of God and said that Jesus had announced him. Even more, Heraclius urged the Byzantines to believe in the Prophet Muhammad but they refused:

"Had they obeyed me, it would have been better for them."

Heraclius ended the letter which he sent to the Prophet by saying: "I wish I were with you, for I would have washed your feet."²⁷³ The response of Heraclius to the Prophet's letter was to have a lasting impact on the image of the Byzantines in Arab history and legend. Three centuries later, Al-Qādī al-Nu'mān provides the following passage: "The Fatimid Caliph al-Mu'izz Billah (341-365/953-975) said: Didn't you hear of the deed of the King of Persia when he received the letter of our grandfather, the Messenger of

letter of the Prophet to Heraclius was still in the possession of his master who is a descendant of Heraclius. See Hamidullah, "La lettre du prophète" Ibid.

272 Browne, Edward. "Some accounts of the Arabic World Entitled 'Nihāyati'l irab fi akhbari'l Furs wal 'Arab,' Particularly of that Part which Treats of the Persian Kings." *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, April, 1900, pp.195-259. The *Sira* of Ibn Hishām also mentions the negative response of the Persian King. *Sira*, trans. by A. Guillaume, p.653.

273 Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, Vol. 2, p. 84.

God, inviting him to Islam? He disdained it, displaying arrogance and tearing the letter apart. God then tore his kingdom apart and dispossessed him of it and they [the Persians] were as good as finished. Whereas when the King of Rum received the letter from the Prophet, he accepted and answered it and such a misfortune did not befall him.²⁷⁴ Thus, the survival and durability of the Byzantine Empire was believed to have some divine sanction connected with Emperor Heraclius' response. The Prophet, having been informed of Heraclius' positive reaction said: "He recognized the truth but the wicked and malicious one was stingy with his earthly kingdom and possessions and preferred this worldly life over his religion."²⁷⁵ Heraclius himself admits it: "By God, I wish I could renounce this kingdom and go with you and be the servant of your 'amīr but I am not inclined to leave my present situation in this kingdom... By God, Christ has ordered us in the New Testament to believe in the 'Ummī Prophet; however, prosperity and happiness lead to the prolongation of my self-deception."²⁷⁶

Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī was told by a Christian bishop that when Heraclius got the letter of the Prophet, he sent it to a man in Rome who read Hebrew and who replied that he is the Prophet they are expecting: "there is no doubt about it so follow him and believe him."²⁷⁷ In Constantinople, Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī was interrogated by Heraclius about the Prophet's lineage and Ibn

²⁷⁴ Al-Qādī al-Nu'mān, *Kitāb al-Majālis*, p.374.

²⁷⁵ Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbit Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa*, Vol. 2 , p.439.

²⁷⁶ Ibn al-'A tham |, *Kitāb al- Futūh*, Vol. I, pp. 130-131.

²⁷⁷ *Sīra*, trans. by Guillaume, p.656.

Shihab answered that the Prophet's lineage was "our best lineage." Heraclius then asked whether anyone of his house made the same claims and whether he had possessed any sovereignty which he had lost and was thus making this claim to regain it. Ibn Shihāb answered both questions negatively. More interesting, Heraclius went on asking about the character of the Prophet's followers and whether they loved him. Heraclius also inquired about the wars between Quraish and the Prophet and ended by asking whether the Prophet was treacherous. According to Ibn Shihāb, the last question was the only inappropriate one.

Heraclius concluded: "Truly, If you have been telling me the truth about him he will conquer the very ground beneath my feet and I wish that I were with him so that I may wash his feet."²⁷⁸

Having related his encounter with Heraclius, Ibn Shihāb summed up his impression of the Byzantine Emperor by saying: "I have never seen a man whom I consider shrewder than that uncircumcized man."²⁷⁹

According to various Arabic sources, upon receiving the letter of the Prophet, Heraclius assembled his generals and, fearing for himself, he addressed them from an upper chamber: "This man [the Prophet Muḥammad] has written me a letter summoning me to his religion; and by God, he is truly the Prophet whom we expect and find in our Books so let us follow him and believe in him." At his words the generals uttered cries of disgust and out

²⁷⁸Ibid., p.654.

²⁷⁹Ibid.

of fear for his life, Heraclius reversed his position, claiming that he was only testing the firmness of their faith. They, then fell down in obeisance.²⁸⁰ The Patriarch of Constantinople Daghāṭir is said to have gone to the Church and acknowledged his belief in the Prophet, but the people beat him until he died.²⁸¹ Thus, according to the Arab authors, the two foremost authorities in the Byzantine Empire, the political and the religious, understood and believed the message of Islam. They were, however, left helpless by the stern opposition of the generals and the patricians. The early Arab historians and chroniclers did not doubt the authenticity of the letter of the Prophet to Heraclius, which is mentioned in the majority of the earlier and later sources. The differences among the various versions are ones of detail and concern the date when the letter was sent and its exact phrasing. The formulation and the wording are close to being the same. What is of particular interest is the fact that most stories in the Arabic sources indicate that Heraclius was leaning towards accepting Islam and that the greatest obstacle was the opposition of the population of the Byzantine Empire. It is extremely doubtful that Heraclius intended to embrace Islam. The hostility of the population was directed against his religious policy, namely, monothelitism and not on his inclination towards Islam. More likely, the still weak and vulnerable position of the Byzantine Empire led Emperor Heraclius to be diplomatic with the Muslim ambassador so as not to antagonize the Arabs.²⁸²

²⁸⁰Ibid., p.655.

²⁸¹Ibid., p.656.

Other Muslim authors mention Heraclius in a variety of situations. Ibn al-'A283 In these texts, Heraclius appears as a real individual, smiling and curious to know about the religious beliefs of the Muslims and their practice. He appreciates the honesty of his Muslim visitors and feels no anger or humiliation at their words and remarks. Most important, however, is the claim that he believes in the Prophet Muḥammad's message.

²⁸²See Muhammad A. al-'Uqailī, *al-Safarāt al-Nabawiyya 'ila Mulūk al-Ālam wa 'Umarā' Aṭrāf al-Jazīra al-'Arabiyya*(Beirut-Amman, 1986). Also Maḥmūd Khaṭṭāb, *al-Safarāt al-Nabawiyya*(Baghdad, 1989).

²⁸³Ibn al-'AKitāb al-Futūh, Vol.I, pp. 128-129.

With all these references, we end up with a three-dimensional image of Heraclius, a Byzantine Emperor, perhaps the only one in the Arabic sources, who cries, walks to Jerusalem, shows distress, smiles, is inquisitive, in short, is humane and personable.

Heraclius was seen as a just ruler and this is reflected in the supposed instructions which he gave to his General Vahan: "You should be just and have compassion towards your children...honor the eminent men and do not disdain the unimportant people. You should be to all of them like a father and a brother. You have seen that those Arabs have been victorious because they have accepted the good commandments and they consult the wise among them. I have enjoined you with what no king has ever enjoined, so beware of disobeying me and beware of following the whims of your soul, *hawā' al-nafs*, for it is the greatest of catastrophes."²⁸⁴ In a subsequent letter, Heraclius stressed to Vahan again, that the Arabs have been victorious only because of the shameful deeds and injustice of the Byzantines.²⁸⁵

A glimpse at Byzantine internal problems are reflected in Heraclius' hint at religious divisions which are, according to him, the source of Byzantine weakness and which encouraged the "newly empowered nation." Heraclius exhorts his people to fight the Arabs "for the sake of your religion, your country, your women and your children" promising to provide them with

²⁸⁴Ibid, p. 221.

²⁸⁵Ibid, p. 249.

horses and men and asking them to obey their commanders.²⁸⁶ Following the battle of Fihl, Heraclius gathered a great number of soldiers to help the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Qaysariyya. He told his soldiers :"The Arabs have been victorious in Syria and they are aiming at the far-reaches of Byzantine lands. Lands, cities, wheat, barley, gold and silver are not enough for them so long as they have not captured your sisters, mothers, daughters, wives, and the freemen and sons of kings."²⁸⁷ Heraclius was playing on all the fears of his soldiers in his desperate attempts at encouraging them to face the Arabs. However, the language used in expressing these fears reflected perhaps mostly the ultimate fears of the Arabs.

In general, Heraclius is placed by Arab authors on a pedestal and is depicted in positive terms. He is detached from his people who commit injustice and are unfaithful. Heraclius has nothing to do with them and expresses that in saying: "By God, I am living in a town, qarya, where there is nothing good..."²⁸⁸ Following the defeat at Yarmük, Heraclius said: "I knew that they were going to defeat you because they [the Arabs] love death as much as you love life."²⁸⁹ And to one of his generals who announced the Byzantine armies' utter defeat, Heraclius said:

²⁸⁶al-'Azdī, *Kitāb al-Futūh*, p.23. Ibn al-'A'tham mentions a similar letter that Heraclius sent to the people of Damascus warning them against infidelity of the Arabs. *Kitāb al-Futūh*, Vol.1, p.160.

²⁸⁷Ibid., p.134.

²⁸⁸Ibid., p.133

²⁸⁹Ibid., p.212.

"You were the most vehement concerning the letter that I received from the Prophet Muhammad. I had wanted to comply and join his religion but you prevented me."²⁹⁰

In the biography of the Prophet and the Muslim historical works, Heraclius was depicted as an ideal ruler. The Muslims had sided with the Byzantines against the Persians during the Mekkan period when Heraclius won an extensive war against the Sassanian Empire. The positive attitude towards him was partly due to his military victories. Heraclius was depicted as courageous, honest, and just. More important, most sources concur that Heraclius wished to convert to Islam were it not for the absolute opposition of the generals and priests. Once the Byzantines started loosing against the Arabs, respect for Caesar dwindled. Indeed the later Byzantine emperors are never depicted in definite positive terms. This was also due fact that the Byzantine Emperor became, in the subsequent periods, the most important enemy of Islam.

In comparison with Constantine and Heraclius, all other Byzantine emperors receive relatively little and cursory attention. The special attention accorded to Constantine stems from the realization of his importance in the history of the Byzantine Empire, and also perhaps, from the influence of the Arabic Christian sources. Heraclius is particularly important because he was contemporaneous with the Prophet of Islam and was the first Byzantine Emperor with whom the Muslim community had

²⁹⁰Ibid., p.213.

to deal with. In addition, he is believed to having received the Prophet's letter favorably.

As stated earlier, we often hear of Byzantine emperors in a nameless way, referred to as *qaysar*, Ceasar. One can try to identify the emperor in question by looking at the specific historical situation. Normally, it does not matter who the actual emperor is for in the various anecdotes *malik al-rūm*, the king of the Byzantines, stands simply as a prop designed either to enhance the qualities of the Muslim ruler or to represent the quintessential Byzantine emperor with no particular qualities and no individual persona.

Such anecdotes are present in a wide variety of sources, historical, geographical and *'adab* literature. One story mentioned by al-'Azdī depicts Mu'āwiyya (41-60/661-680), who was being awakened by the Church bells asking for a volunteer who would carry his letter to the king of Rum and would call to prayer once he steps on the emperor's carpet. A young man from the Arab tribe of Ghassān volunteered and did as ordered. Immediately, the Byzantine patricians pulled off their swords but the Byzantine Emperor, who remains anonymous, kneeled over the Arab man asking the patricians in the name of Jesus and as part of their duty towards him to hold back and told them: "Mu'āwiyya is a man who is getting old and the church bells prevents him from sleeping. He wants us to kill this man because of his call to prayer so that he may do the same. By God things will happen contrary to what he expects."²⁹¹ This

anecdote has the double goal of pointing to Mu‘āwiyya’s shrewdness and also to the political astuteness of the Byzantine Emperor who in contrast to his patricians, calculates long term implications. He is a man of vision who understands his enemy’s mentality. It also displays a view of the relationship between the Byzantine Emperor and his patricians. The Byzantine Emperor has to physically and verbally intercede in order to stop the commotion that the words uttered by the young Muslim had created. Emperor Justinian II (685–695 and 705–711) is mentioned in *Kitāb al-Hayawān* also as an example of the intelligence and vision of the Byzantine emperors. When Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik (65–86/685–705) was fighting Muṣ‘ab Ibn al-Zubair in 689, the advisors of Justinian II urged him to enter in a war against the Caliph. In order to explain his non-interference policy, the Emperor introduced two dogs which he excited to fight one another. He then introduced a fox and immediately the dogs stopped fighting each other and attacked the fox.²⁹² Emperor Justinian was pointing to the fate of the Byzantines if they were to interfere in the fight among the Arabs. In another anecdote, Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik is said to have sent his ambassador al-Sha‘bi to the Byzantine Emperor who sent back with him a letter saying: "How odd for a people who have such a person to put in power another." The Byzantine Emperor hoped that the Caliph would be jealous of al-Sha‘bi. ‘Abd al-Malik, however, realized the

²⁹¹Ibn Qutaiba, ‘Uyūn al-Akhbār, Vol. 2, p.198.

²⁹²al-Jāhīz, *Kitāb al-Hayawān*, Vol.II, p.172. Also in Ibn Qutaiba, ‘Uyūn al-Akhbār, Vol. I, p.46.

Emperor's intentions and told al-Sha'bī: "he envied me for having you."²⁹³

One cannot fail to notice the popular character of this anecdotal literature. There is a story in the Arabic sources concerning the famous sixth century Arab poet Imru' al-Qais who is said to have gone to Caesar seeking his assistance against the Banū 'Asad who had killed his father. In this pre-Islamic episode, the Byzantine Emperor seems to be heavily involved in Arab tribal politics. The Emperor was very welcoming of 'Imru' al-Qais until he heard from an intrigant of the Banū 'Asad that the poet was involved in a relationship with his daughter. The Emperor now planned to kill him and he ordered that a shirt woven with gold threads and immersed in poison be given to the poet. The poison spread on the skin of Imru' al-Qais and this is why he came to be called "the ulcerous one."²⁹⁴ In another version, the reason for the Emperor's anger was the claim of Tammarah al-'Asadi that Imru' al-Qais had insulted the Emperor in his poems calling him 'ilj.²⁹⁵

²⁹³al-Mubarrad, *al-Kāmil*, Eds. M. Ibrahim and S. al-Sayyid(Cairo, n.d.), Vol. 2, p.113.

²⁹⁴Abu al-Faraj al-Asfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*(Bulaq) vol.8, p.73. and Pseudo-Jāhīz, *al-Maḥāsin wa al-Adād*, p. 289.

²⁹⁵Yaqubī, *Tārīkh*, Vol.I, p. 220. It is more than likely that the Arab authors confused the sixth century Arab poet with the fourth century Lakhmid king of Ḥīra who seems to have been a client of Emperor Constantine the Great. This is the same king whose name is mentioned in the most important Arabic inscription of pre-Islamic times, the Namara inscription. As a king of Ḥīra he had been in a special relationship with Persia but had defected to the Byzantines and became their client. See Irfan Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century* (Washington, 1984), pp. 31-47. Husain Jum'a points to the

While the first version points to the possibility of a love relationship developing between a Byzantine princess and an Arab amir, the second version shows the response of the Byzantine emperor to the verses of an Arabic defamatory poem indicating his knowledge of Arabic and ascribing to him a reaction to the one an Arab amir would have had.

There are much such old accounts. Some are of Persian origin and were in circulation in the popular history of Persian-Roman relations. And we find in the Arabic sources, anecdotes that involve Persians and Byzantines while others were transported into the framework of Arab-Byzantine relations. In many ways, the Arabs took the former place of the Persians with respect to the Byzantines inheriting the hostility and also the cultural interaction. Qudāma states that Persia was the first to provide the example of the defense of the Domains, the *mamlaka*, against the Byzantines.²⁹⁶ In these anecdotes where the Persians are interacting with the Byzantines, the Arabs are again presenting us with their understanding of that interaction and with the way the Byzantines dealt with an enemy equal to them, in this case the Persians. This interaction can be seen as a harbinger of later Arab-Byzantine interaction.

LEO III(717-741)

apocryphal parts of the story especially the supposed love affair between the poet and the Emperor's daughter. "Rihlat Imru' al-Qais Baina al-Wāqi' wa al-Khayāl," *al-Turāth al-'Arabi* 24(1989), pp. 89-100.

²⁹⁶Qudāma Ibn Ja'far, *Kitāb al-Kharāj*, p. 252.

The descriptions of Byzantine emperors in the Arabic sources reflect the ambiguity of the texts whereby to any positive reference, a negative one is soon attached. One such instance is Emperor Leo III(717-741) who is depicted as a sympathetic character with a strong appreciation of the Umayyad Caliph 'Umar Ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz. Caliph 'Umar II(99-101/717-720) was the only truly pious Umayyad caliph in Islamic annals. Responding to the realities and moods of the time, he did not show enthusiasm for prolonging the war against the Byzantines. He is also the only Umayyad Caliph who is reported to have invited a Byzantine emperor to accept Islam, thus following the example of the Prophet who had sent a similar invitation to Heraclius. When Caliph 'Umar was poisoned, Emperor Leo sent him the most learned man in medicine to cure him. When Caliph 'Umar died the Byzantine Emperor was saddened because the "good man" is dead and he told the Muslim ambassadors: "don't cry for him and cry for yourself...I was told about his piety, favors and honesty so much that if someone would bring death to life, after Jesus, I would have believed that he would. I have not admired the monk who has left the world to worship his Lord in his cell; but I admired the one who had the world under his feet but chose, instead, to renounce worldly pleasures and live like a monk. People of goodness stay with people of evil only for a short time."²⁹⁷ He then accepted the request of the Muslim ambassadors to free Muslim prisoners for "We would not promise

²⁹⁷ Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam, *Sīrat 'Umar Ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz*, 2nd edition, (Damascus, 1954), p.144.

him something in his lifetime and deny it to him after his death.²⁹⁸ In addition to his acknowledgment of the goodness of Caliph 'Umar, The Byzantine Emperor is upright and keeps his promise. He is respectful of the "pious Caliph" and when the latter wrote him a letter asking him to release a blind Muslim prisoner who had been imprisoned for his refusal to abjure Islam, the emperor answered the messenger: "I do not want to push this pious Caliph to an extreme; I will send him the prisoner."²⁹⁹ Within the context of this panegyric work, the acknowledgment on the part of the Byzantine Emperor of the piety and goodness of Caliph 'Umar holds a special weight. Indeed, even the Caliph's major rival and enemy, the Byzantine emperor, changes his attitude and behavior towards the Caliphate because of the unique qualities of the Caliph with important beneficial consequences for the inhabitants of the Caliphate, and those imprisoned in Byzantine territory. On the other hand, the same Emperor Leo III is depicted, in the same text, as a perfidious and stingy man who would confiscate any extra money that the Caliph wished to send to the Muslim captives in Constantinople. In a letter to the captives 'Umar says: "I have sent you five dinars each and if I were not afraid lest the Tyrant of the Rum keeps it away from you, I would have increased it."³⁰⁰

²⁹⁸Ibid.

²⁹⁹Ibid.

³⁰⁰Ibid., p.140

IRENE(797-802)

The Arab authors provide information on various facets of the rule of the Byzantine Empress Irene(797-802), wife of Leo IV (775-780). Irene had taken over the regency of her son Constantine V who was a minor. In 797, by order of Irene, Constantine was blinded in the Purple Room and Irene became the sole ruler of the Byzantine Empire. She was the first woman to control the Byzantine Empire as an independent ruler in her own right and she took the title of emperor.³⁰¹ The contemporary Byzantine authors have very positive descriptions of Empress Irene, who was responsible for the restoration of icon veneration in the Seventh Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 787.

In *Kitāb al-’Aghāni*, Empress Irene is referred to as *al-mar’ā* [the woman].³⁰² *Mas’ūdī*, gives her name in *al-Tanbīh* explaining its meaning, peace. He also states that she was given the title of *Augusta*.³⁰³ *Kitāb al-Aghāni* mentions that Irene had ruled the Byzantine Empire because there was no one else in her family who could rule. She corresponded with the caliphs *al-Mahdī*(158-169/775-785), *al-Hadī*(169-170/785-786) and *Hārūn al-Rashīd*(170-193/786-809) referring to them in terms of aggrandizement and veneration. *Mas’ūdī* states further that "Irene ruled alone for five years and maintained peaceful relations with

³⁰¹G. Ostrogorski, *History of the Byzantine State*, p.181. Also Charles Diehl, *Figures byzantines* (Hildesheim, 1965), Vol.1, pp. 81-110

³⁰²*Kitāb al-Aghāni*, Vol. 17, p.44.

³⁰³*al-Mas’ūdī*, *Tanbīh*, p.166.

Hārūn al-Rashīd sending him gifts and tribute. She built a palace in Constantinople. Her logothete Aetius was a good advisor and a man of authority and government.³⁰⁴ She kept on sending gifts to the caliphs until her son came out of age and started causing havoc.³⁰⁵ Hārūn al-Rashīd sent him a letter whose content was mostly taken up with theoretical statements and theological points. At the end of the letter, the Caliph summons Constantine VI(780-797) to "a word common between us and you, that we worship none but God and that we associate nothing with him." He also advised the Emperor to embrace Islam in order to ensure his welfare in both this world and the next. Otherwise, if the Emperor is only concerned with this life, he should pay a tribute, the *jizyah*, to the Muslim Caliph. Hārūn al-Rashīd was surprised that the Emperor should decide to put an end to the previous truce, and exchange the many advantages resulting therefrom for a state of war.³⁰⁶ According to *Kitāb al-"*Aghānī, Irene feared for the Byzantine Empire from the strength of Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd. She, therefore, tricked her son and blinded him. Irene then took control of the affairs of government but the inhabitants of the Byzantine Empire disapproved of her deed and hated her for it.³⁰⁷ Similarly, *Mas'ūdī* states that Constantine

304 *Ibid.*, p.167.

305 *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, vol.17, p.44.

306 See D.M. Dunlop, "A Letter from Harun al-Rashid to the Emperor Constantine VI," In *Memoriam Paul Kahle*(Berlin, 1968), ed. Matthew Black and Georg Fohrer, pp.106-115. For the text of the letter see Ahmad Farid al-Rifa'i, 'Asr al-Ma'mūn (Cairo,1927), Vol.II, Appendix II, pp.188-236.

307 *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, Vol.17, p.44.

became unjust, tyrannical and that he violated the agreement with Caliph Harūn al-Rashīd. Constantine's tyranny and vice became obvious to his subjects. Irene feared the Caliph's attack and she therefore ordered a heated mirror to be exposed to Constantine's eyes and he was blinded.³⁰⁸ The act of blinding Constantine VI was thus explained by the Arab authors in terms of Byzantine-Arab relations. Irene's act was not seen as one reflecting her own political ambitions. Rather it was the act of an able stateswoman who placed the interest of the Empire above everything else. The actions of Constantine VI were detrimental to the Empire as they were putting the Byzantine territories in danger of serious attacks from their powerful neighbor. The Arab authors did not condemn the cruel act of blinding and in fact seemed to condone it in view of Constantine's tyrannical rule and aggressive policy against the Arabs. Such an act, that of blinding, was not practiced in the Caliphate. It was only in the fourth/tenth century that the Muslims began to blind the claimants to the throne, thus making their accession impossible. One of the first to suffer this fate was the deposed Abbasid Caliph al-Qāhir in 322/934 who was blinded with a red hot nail.

The Arab authors and especially Mas'ūdī, mention Irene and her rule in the sequence of their list of Byzantine emperors. The fact that they do not dwell on the idea of a female "emperor" is significant. They state that there were no males in Irene's family who were fit to rule and that she acquired her position as

³⁰⁸al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbīh*, p.167.

ruler of Byzantium because she was the mother of the heir to the throne. That women could be accorded supreme powers, commemorated as rulers, acclaimed in public ceremonies and held responsible for official documents and imperial policy was not an ordinary phenomenon and the fact that the Arab authors chose not to question it or elaborate on it is peculiar.³⁰⁹

NICEPHORUS I(802-811)

The reign of Nicephorus I(802-811) corresponds to the last few years of the reign of Caliph Harūn al-Rashīd(170/786-193/809) and the first years of al-Āmīn(193/809-198/813). Emperor Nicephorus is mentioned in Tabari's *Tarīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk* mainly in the context of his relationship with Hārūn al-Rashīd. In the works of Maṣ'ūdī, both *Muṛūj al-Dhahab* and *al-Tanbīh wa al-'*Ishrāf, Nicephorus I is referred to in positive terms as having undertaken major reforms in the Byzantine Empire. What renders this Arab position significant is the fact that Nicephorus has received negative treatment in the work of his Byzantine contemporary chronicler, Theophanes.³¹⁰

³⁰⁹Steven Runciman in "The Empress Irene the Athenian," *Medieval Women*, ed. Berek Baker(Oxford, 1978), pp.101-118, states that Irene's autonomy was accepted by the Byzantines and ended only when she could not exercise it effectually. Judith Herrin discusses Irene's power as providing symbols of female leadership in "In Search of the Byzantine Women:Three Avenues of Approach," *Images of Women in Antiquity*, ed. Averil Cameron and Amelie Kuhrt (Detroit, 1983), pp.167-189.

³¹⁰For a reappraisal of Nicephorus' reign see J.B. Bury, *History of the Eastern Roman Empire*(New York, 1965), pp.5-15; Romilly Jenkins, *Byzantium: the Imperial Centuries*(Toronto, 1987), pp.117-123; George Ostrogorski, *History of the Byzantine*

Nicephorus I spent all his career in the financial administration. As a logothete of the Treasury, he was very well able to judge the financial and economic situation of the Empire. When he became emperor, he reorganized the financial administration through the imposition of taxes, cancellation of exemptions and a more diligent tax collection. Theophanes described these financial measures as terribly oppressive. Modern historians do not view them as such³¹¹ and Mas'udi certainly did not conceive of these measures as being harsh or unjust. Mas'udi's position and attitude is significant since the Arab authors seldom relinquish an opportunity to attack Byzantine injustice and oppression.

In the list of Byzantine emperors that Mas'udi provides in his later work *al-Tanbih wa al-'Ishraf*, Nicephorus is listed as the thirty-eighth emperor, having ruled for seven years and three months during the reigns of Hārūn al-Rashīd(170-193/786-809) and al-Amin(193-198/809-813).³¹² Nicephorus actually ruled for nine years between 802 and 811. Mas'udi also provides information on Nicephorus' position before he became emperor stating correctly that Nicephorus was a logothete in charge of tax collection.³¹³

State(New Brunswick, 1969), pp.186-200.

³¹¹Gregoire Cassimatis, "La dixième vexation de l'empereur Nicephore," *Byzantion* 7(1932), pp.140-160; G.I. Bratianu, *Etudes byzantines d'histoire économique et sociale* (Paris, 1938), pp.186-216; Warren Treadgold, "The Revival of Byzantine Learning," *American Historical Review* 84(1979)#5, pp.1245-1266.

³¹²al-Mas'udi, *Tanbih*, p.167.

³¹³Ibid., p.168.

Arab historians assign Nicephorus I Arab origins claiming that he was a descendant of the Arabian Ghassanid King, Jabala Ibn al-'Aiham who became Muslim briefly during the reign of Heraclius. They add, however, that unable to cope with the new principle of equality that Islam brought, Jabala fled to Byzantine territory where he resumed the profession of Christianity. Another tradition considers Nicephorus to be of the Christian Arab tribe of Iyād that had emigrated to *Bilād al-Rūm* from Mesopotamia during the Caliphate of 'Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. ³¹⁴ This legend of Nicephorus' Arab origins contributed to accredit the idea that the Byzantine Emperor knew Arabic. He could even appreciate Arabic poetry and invited the poet Abu al-'Atāhiyya to his court.

Emperor Nicephorus is mentioned within the context of a correspondence with Caliph Harūn al-Rashīd. This was the period when the Abbasids were at the apogee of their strength. One of the first decisions that Nicephorus had undertaken was to discontinue the payment of the tribute that Empress Irene had paid for several years to the Caliphate. In fact Mas'ūdī states that Nicephorus' excuse for plotting against Irene and removing her was her payment of tribute to the Muslim Caliph. ³¹⁵

Ṭabarī quotes a letter that Emperor Nicephorus sent to Caliph Harūn al-Rashīd in the year 187/802 and in which he denounced the truce signed previously by his predecessor Irene: "The Queen

³¹⁴Ibid., p.167. al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Rusul wal-Mulūk*, III, 695 and *Kitāb al-'Uyūn*, ed. De Goeje, (Leiden, 1869), p. 309.

³¹⁵al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbīh*, p.167.

who reigned before me gave you the position of the tower and placed herself in the position of a simple pawn. She paid the tribute which had earlier been imposed on you. This was the result of the weakness and foolishness of women.³¹⁶ In *Kitāb al-’Aghānī* the letter goes as follows: "This woman has put you, your father and your brother in the position of the king and put herself in the position of the commoner. I am changing your position."³¹⁷

Harūn al-Rashīd wrote back angrily: "From Hārūn, Commander of the Faithful, to the Byzantine dog, *kalb al-rūm*. I have read your letter, Oh son of the unbelieving mother. You shall not hear my answer but shall see it with your own eyes."³¹⁸ Hārūn Al-Rashīd immediately marched against the Emperor who, being occupied with the revolt of Bardanes, offered to pay tribute in return for peace. However, as soon as the Caliph left for Raqqa, the news arrived that the Byzantine Emperor had broken his promise. The theme of the Byzantines as perfidious is indeed a constant one. Verses of poetry survived denouncing Nicephorus' treacherous action:

"Nicephorus has violated the truce that you granted him but the wheel of fortune will turn again against him.

Nicephorus, if you betray, once the Imām is away, it is because of your ignorance and blindness.

Did you really believe that you will escape your fate? what you

³¹⁶ al-Tabarī, *Tārīkh al-Rusul wal-Mulūk*, III, 695.

³¹⁷ *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, Vol. 17, p. 44.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*

believed was a simple illusion.

The Imam is capable of restraining you whether your dwelling is near or far away.

He is a king who has dedicated himself to Holy War and his enemy will always be subjugated by him." During the same circumstances the poet Abu al-'Atāhya said: "The world has manifested its pleasure to Hārūn and Nicephorus has become a *dhimmi* to the Imām."³¹⁹

As a consequence of Nicephorus' action, Hārūn invaded Heraclea and following its capture in 190/805-6, Nicephorus sent to the Caliph the *kharāj* and the *jizia* for himself and for all the inhabitants of the Empire; it amounted to 50,000 dinars. The *jizia* is the capitation tax that the non-Muslims are supposed to pay in return for Muslim protection. The Muslims called the tribute that they got from the Byzantines in exchange of truce, *jizya*, implying the dependence of the Byzantine Empire on Muslim protection. The inhabitants of the Byzantine Empire are hence living in the same subjugated conditions as the Christian

³¹⁹Ibid., p.45. This correspondence was mentioned in an article in the Jordanian newspaper, *al-Dustūr*, in the context of the Iraq-U.S. relations during the events preceding the Gulf War. The writer states that the letter that Saddām Ḥussain sent to George Bush on the 16th of August, 1990 reminded him of the letter that Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd sent to Emperor Nicephorus. The similarity between the two letters, according to the journalist, is that Nicephorus had been insolent and so deserved to be called the Dog of the Rum and as a result he was silenced and he submitted; Bush is also insolent and he will submit. President Saddām Ḥussain thus confirmed that the image of Nicephorus is recurrent and that the image of Hārūn al-Rashīd is still present. *Al-Dustūr*, Thurs. August 23, 1990, p.18.

population of the Muslim Empire. In fact, the exchange has its special legal case which does not include the implied subordination linked with the *jizya* since the Byzantines did not lose their independent political personality and their sovereignty to become People of the Book.³²⁰ The use of the term *jizya* in our Arabic texts was intended to signify the humiliation of the Byzantine Emperor and Empire.

Mas'ūdī also mentions Nicephorus I in the context of the first important exchange of prisoner, *fidā'*, between Muslims and Byzantines in the year 189 H.³²¹ Mas'ūdī's works contain the most singular references to Nicephorus. He states that Nicephorus was the first Byzantine Emperor to name his own son as his heir to the throne and that this institution had never before existed in the Byzantine Empire.³²² In fact, the institution of a system of co-emperors in Byzantium was of special value in securing the succession which was not regulated by law. Earlier Byzantine emperors had adopted the practice of designating their desired successor as co-Emperor: Heraclius designated his son Constantine as co-Emperor. Theophanes shows the steps Emperor Leo III took to ensure the coronation of his son.³²³

³²⁰Fathī 'Othmān, *al-Hudūd al-'Islamiyya al-Byzantīyya baina al-Iḥtikāk al-Harbi wal Itiṣāl al-Hadāri* (Cairo, 1966), Vol. 2, p.390. Muhammad Hamidullah calls this particular situation of the Byzantine Empire: "tributary independent state," *Muslim Conduct of State*, p. 29.

³²¹al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbīh*(Beirut, 1981), p.176.

³²²al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbīh*, p.168.

³²³Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed.C.de Boor(Leipzig,1883), Vol. 1, pp.399-401.

Emperor Nicephorus was also, according to Mas'ūdī, the first Byzantine emperor to grow a beard. He refused to shave it saying that "shaving one's beard was an attempt at changing the creation of the Creator."³²⁴ The inference is that Nicephorus was deeply religious and did not shave his beard out of piety.

However, Nicephorus was not known to be particularly pious. In fact the Byzantine chronicler Theophanes was violently hostile to him because Nicephorus had led a conspiracy against Empress Irene who was responsible for the restoration of image worshiping through a decree of the Seventh Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 787. In any event, the information of Mas'ūdī is incorrect. A survey of existing portraits from coins, statues and mosaics does indicate that from Constantine the Great onward the emperor kept their beards shaved or at least very close cropped; however, starting with Emperor Phocas(602-10), "we find an emperor with a really distinctive beard," and he set a precedent that would last until the end of the Empire.³²⁵

Another innovation of Nicephorus was, according to Mas'ūdī, the new title on his acts and letters: "The kings of the Rum had used the title of 'King of Christianity,' *malik al-niṣrāniyya*, and Nicephorus changed that and employed instead the title of *malik*

³²⁴al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbih*, p.168.

³²⁵Constance Head, "Physical Descriptions of the Emperors in Byzantine Historical Writing," *Byzantion* 50 (1980), pp. 226-40. In *Imperial Byzantine Portraits: A Verbal and Graphic Gallery* (New York,1982), p. 39; Constance Head refers to an imperial bust of Phocas in the British Museum and to coins which depict Phocas with a prominent beard grown probably to conceal a disfiguring scar on his face.

al-rūm justifying it by saying: "the title of *malik al-niṣrāniyya* is incorrect. I am not the King of Christianity, I am the King of *al-Rum* and kings do not lie." Nicephorus also prevented his subjects from calling the Arabs "Sarakenos" which is explained to mean the Slaves of Sarah. He explained that this too was incorrect.³²⁶ In this passage of *Mas'ūdī*, Nicephorus is depicted to be a honest and correct. His concern for the truth was so paramount that he will go to the extent of making innovations and changing traditions in order to accommodate reality. *Mas'ūdī*'s positive description of Emperor Nicephorus I is in stark contrast to the hostility of the contemporary Byzantine chronicler, Theophanes whose attitude might partially explain the more positive view of *Mas'ūdī*.

³²⁶*al-Mas'ūdī*, *Tanbīh*, p.168. The appellation Srakenos has puzzled scholars. V.Christides states that the explanation that the Byzantines gave was that the Arabs adopted the name "Saracen" in order to suggest descent from Sarah and to hide their illegitimate parentage from the concubine Hagar. See his "The Names Arabes, Srakeinos etc... and their False Byzantine Etymologies," *BZ* 65(1972), pp. 329-333; Christides suggests that the Saracens may have originally been an important tribe. See *The Image of the Pre-Islamic Arab in the Byzantine Sources*, Ph.D., Princeton University, 1970 D. Graf and M. O'Connor have proposed that the term "Sarcen" is derived from a technical term in the vocabulary of the inhabitants of North Arabia, *sharikat*, "federation company." Other opinions about the etymology of Saraceni associate the term with the Arabic *shārq*, East, or with the Aramaic *Seraq*, meaning "emptiness, bareness." It has also been suggested that it is derived from the Semitic *saraqa*, to steal, and means, thieves and plunderers. See "The Origin of the Term Saracen and the Rawwafa Inscriptions," *Byzantine Studies* 4(1977)*1, pp. 52-66.

THEOPHILUS(829-842)

Emperor Theophilus(829-842) is mentioned in the account of a double embassy between him and 'Abd al-Rahmān II, the Umayyad caliph of Spain (206-238/822-852). The Muslims of Ifriqiya and Sicily were threatening Byzantine possessions in Italy. In the year 225/839-840, an embassy was sent from the Emperor Theophilus carrying a letter to the Caliph in Cordova. It was the Emperor, thus, who was inaugurating diplomatic relations himself, "something that powerful rulers loath." Theophilus was asking for an amicable treaty. The message also urged 'Abd al-Rahmān to reclaim in the Orient the patrimony of his ancestors, the Umayyads, and also to command for himself the island of Crete.³²⁷ The Byzantine Emperor was reminding the Cordovan Amir of the tragic death of his Umayyad ancestor, Caliph Marwān II(127-32/744-50) under the blow of the Abbasids. Theophilus was invoking all the arguments that could play a role in boosting and encouraging the Umayyad amir including the suggestion that he should take the place of the Abbasids in the Oriental part of the Muslim Maghrib. Theophilus seems well aware of Islamic internal politics and tries to play Muslim rulers against one another. However, the Byzantine Emperor is misinformed as to the actual power and the means of action of both the Abbasid Caliphate and the Cordovan kingdom.

³²⁷E. Levi-Provencal, "Un échange d'ambassades entre Cordoue et Byzance au IXeme siecle," *Byzantion* 12(1937), pp.1-24.

BASIL I(867-886)

Starting with the reign of Basil I(867-86), the founder of the Macedonian dynasty, Mas'ūdī reveals a close knowledge of the Byzantine emperors and their rule. Mas'ūdī knew that Basil the Slav, *al-Saqlabī*, arrived to Constantinople from his province of Tarākiah, Thrace, in order to find a living, and soon his knowledge of horses won him a favorable place with Michael, son of Emperor Theophilus. "He was appointed administrator of the Stables and later on he became the *parakoimomenos*, that is the administrator of the Empire."³²⁸ Emperor Michael married one woman and gave another in marriage to Basil so as to have them both, since religious law forbade him to have two wives at the same time. Basil finally succeeded in killing the Emperor and took the throne.³²⁹ Mas'ūdī reproduces the story found in the Byzantine source, the *Chronographia* of Theodosii Meliteni.³³⁰ Furthermore, he is aware that Basil I is the grandfather of Constantine [VII Porphyrogenitus] son of Leo [VI the Wise], the

³²⁸ The *parakoimomenos* slept in the emperor's room and watched over his safety. The position was given to a secure man who had the emperor's trust, irrespective of his origins or standing. The role assigned to the *parakoimemnos* gave him enormous responsibility and under a weak emperor, one could speak of a real reign of *parakoimomenos*. The influence and power of the *parakoimomenos* went increasing in the tenth century. See Rodolphe Guilland, *Recherches sur les institutions byzantines*(Berlin, 1967), Vol. I, pp. 202-215.

³²⁹ *al-Mas'ūdī*, *Tanbih*, p.171.

³³⁰ *Theodosii Meliteni qui fertur Chronographia*, ed. L.F. Tafel, Munich, 1859, pp.159-176.

present emperor of the Byzantines "at the time of the writing of this book which is the year 345/956."

ROMANUS LECAPENUS(920-944)

Mas'ūdī demonstrates the same close knowledge concerning the story of Romanus Lecapenus' rise to power: Romanos, the Patrikos of the Sea and the head of his army, *sāhib maghāzih*. Lecapenus dominated the minor Emperor Constantine and while effectively ruling, he had promised that neither he nor his children will ever claim the throne. However, two years later, Lecapenus breached his promise and "took the title of Emperor, put on the crown, the purple cloths that only kings wear, and the red shoes, and detained [Emperor] Constantine. Romanos had four sons. He made the middle one a eunuch and consecrated him to the service of the church. His name was Theophylactos and he later became patriarch... His other sons are called Christopher, Stephan and Constantine. He married his daughter Helena to [Emperor] Constantine and they had a son, Romanos, who is now the heir apparent..." Mas'ūdī relates how the sons of Romanos Lecapenus, Stephan and Constantine, conjured a conspiracy with Emperor Constantine against Lecapenus which succeeded in exiling him to an island near Constantinople. Later on, Emperor Constantine managed to exile them to two separate islands. Mas'ūdī states further that while Romanos and Constantine are dead, Stephan is still alive "according to the information we get in Fustāt from the merchants coming from Byzantium."³³¹ In the

³³¹Mas'ūdī, *Tanbīh*, pp.182-4.

case of both emperors Basil I and Romanos Lecapenus, the detailed information available in the works of Mas'udi point to his better knowledge of contemporary events in the Byzantine Empire and perhaps also to the widening knowledge and expanding relations and communication between the two empires in the late ninth and tenth centuries.

NICEPHORUS PHOCAS(963-969)

The whole Macedonian period between 867 and 1025 was a brilliant time in the political existence of the Byzantine Empire. The triumph of the Empire was especially great under Nicephorus Phocas(963-9), John Tzimisces(969-976) and Basil II(976-1025). During the period in which he ruled, Nicephorus Phocas concentrated his attention on the East. In 965 he captured Tarsus³³² and in 969 Antioch fell to his troops as well as the important Syrian center, the city of Aleppo which was the residence of the Hamdanids. Nicephorus Phocas has been described in contradictory terms by his contemporaries. While Leo Diakonos states that Nicephorus Phocas was "a man who, without

332 In connection with the fall of Tarsus, Yāqūt, the thirteenth century Arab geographer, narrates a story based on the account of refugees: Nicephorus Phocas ordered that two banners be raised as emblems of the land of Islam and the land of the Rum respectively. Around the first banner should gather those who desired justice, impartiality, safety of property, family life, children, good roads, just laws and kind treatment. Around the second should gather all those who upheld adultery, , oppressive legislation, violence, extortion, the seizure of landed estates and the confiscation of property. Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, ed. F. Wustenfeld (Leipzig, 1866-73) Vol. 3, p.527.

doubt, was the leader of the age in virtue and strength," John Skilitzes is hostile to him because of his toleration of the misbehavior of his soldiers, the financial burden laid on the state by his campaigns and also his treatment of the Church.³³³

Ibn Hawqal, a contemporary of Nicephorus Phocas, lists as the source of complaints, the Emperor's financial exactions. Nicephorus Phocas demanded ten golden dinars from every household that possessed servants, cows, sheep, arable and pasture land. From the less wealthy, he demanded one man and his equipment, in addition to a sum of money. The campaigns of Nicephorus Phocas were entirely financed from exactions for he never drew on the funds of his own treasury, fortune, and revenues. It was his method of gathering money which made the Christians hate him, loath his rule and in the end, this was the cause of his murder.³³⁴ This passage of Ibn Hawqal contains imageries of injustice and oppression, probably the only way in which the immense military success of Nicephorus Phocas could be undermined. They also fall within the themes already familiar of accusing the Byzantine rulers of injustice. It does stand in marked contrast to the Arabs' description of Emperor Heraclius as just and upright. The claim of Ibn Hawqal that Nicephorus Phocas did not spend funds from his own treasury, reinforces the attribute of miser which has often been used by the Arab authors to describe the Byzantines. In a sermon, Ibn Nubāta points to the

³³³Rosemary Morris, "The Two Faces of Nikephoros Phocas, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 12 (1988), pp. 83-115.

³³⁴Ibn Hawqal, *Kitāb Sūrat al-'Ard*, p.199.

success of Nicephorus Phocas who subdued countries, conquered lands, brought destruction, and surpassed in his injustice and his impertinence all extent.³³⁵ The Hamdānid poet Abu Firās mentions Nicephorus Phocas in one of his poems. The occasion was a discussion that the two supposedly had over the respective merits of the Arabs and Byzantines. The piece starts with the following verse: "You claim, oh ox with thick dewlaps..."³³⁶ This is one of the rare references to the physical aspect of a Byzantine Emperor. The physical appearance of this particular emperor has been described by several Byzantine authors as well as by the Latin envoy Liutprand of Cremona who stated: "a monstrosity of a man, dwarf fat-headed with tiny mole's eyes; disfigured by a short, broad, thick beard going grey; disgraced by a neck scarcely an inch long..."³³⁷

Tabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya, has preserved an Arabic poem, full of insults and defiance, that Nicephorus Phocas is supposed to have send to Caliph al-Mu'tī (334-363/946-74) and in which Nicephorus saw himself as the champion of Christianity. He boasted of achieving Byzantine conquests and threatened to march against Baghdad, Egypt, and Jerusalem. He insulted the Muslims

³³⁵ In M. Canard, *Saif al-Dawla: Recueil de Textes Relatifs à l'Emir Sayf al-Dawla* (Algiers, 1934), pp. 416-17.

³³⁶ Abu Firās, *Diwān*, (Beirut, 1873), pp. 92-98 and (Beirut, 1910), pp. 104-105. The introduction to the *Diwān* was written by Ibn Khalawaih who shows that the poem is an echo to a real discussion. See N. Adontz and M. Canard, "Quelques noms de personnages byzantins dans une pièce du poète arabe Abu Firas (Xeme siècle)", *Byzantion* 11 (1936), pp. 451-460.

³³⁷ Rosemary Morris, "The Two Faces of Nikephoros Phocas."

in the person of their Prophet and threatened to march against Mecca to establish the throne of Christ. The poem sent by Emperor Nicephorus was addressed to Caliph al-Mu'tī (334/946-363/974):

"From the pure and Christian King to the one assuming the burdens of power of the family of Hāshim: Didn't you hear what I have been up to? yes, but you are unable to do anything. Nothing is left in you *thughūr* except for remains." Nicephorus then mentions his capture of the Armenian *thughūr* and his invasion of the Mesopotamian *thughūr*: Hadath, Mar'ash, Edessa, Tarsus ... He reached Aleppo capturing its women and destroying its walls. Nicephorus then promises the capture of Antioch and Damascus, which he calls the dwelling of his ancestors: "And the dwelling of my ancestors was Damascus and its procession will revert under my seal." He asks the Arabs to return to *San'a'* and *al-Tahā'im*: "Dwellers of the sands, Woe unto you, go back to your land of *San'a'* and *al-Tahā'im*." Nicephorus will also conquer Egypt and he even threatens the people of Baghdad: "You accepted the Dailami to be your Caliph and thus you became the slaves of the Dailam slaves. Return to the land of the Hijaz humiliated for I will lead my army to Baghdad and burn its top and destroy its walls, and take its children captives . From there I will go to Shiraz and Rayy, so inform Khurasan about my intentions. I will also go to Mekka and I will possess it for eternity. I will conquer Yaman... and then Jerusalem. I will conquer East and West and propagate the religion of the Cross."

Nicephorus' poem is full of threats with the stated intention of propagating the religion of the cross. This 'crusading' mentality was not understood by the Byzantines, although in his *Taktika* Emperor Leo(866-912) posited the Muslims as a model and pointed as one of the main reason of their military success, the mobilizing ideology of *jihād*. Nicephorus Phocas understood the influence that the promise of a celestial reward could exercise and tried, in vain, to make the Church adopt a doctrine similar to that of Muslim martyrdom. He asked the Greek clergy to honor as martyrs all the Christian soldiers who died fighting the Muslims. The Patriarch Polyeuktos opposed the demand on the ground that the 13th canon of St. Basil's *First Canonicle Epistle* excluded from the eucharist any Christian who sheds blood, even in war.³³⁸

338 This is the famous Bishop of Ceasarea. The text referred to was not a canon but a simple advice: "Our fathers, St. Basil said, have not considered the crimes that are committed in war as criminal...However, I advise to deprive them of communion for three years." In Marius Canard, "La guerre sainte dans le monde islamique et dans le monde chrétien," *Revue Africaine*(Algiers, 1936), pp.605-623, Reprinted in *Byzance et les musulmans du Proche Orient*(Variorum Reprints, London, 1973), #VIII. See also Ernest Nys. "Le droit des gens dans les rapport des Arabes et des Byzantins," *Revue de Droit International et de Legislation Comparée* 26(1894)#5, pp.461-487. Many scholars have considered these wars to have heralded the Crusades. Joseph N. Yussuf points that these wars never got the sanction the blessings of the Byzantine church. *Tarikh al-Dawla al-Byzantiiyya*(Alexandria, 1984), p.163. The Latin clergy whose members did not hesitate to take part in combats provoked the stupor and indignation of Anna Comnena. Paul Lemerle states that "the ideal and idea of the Crusade is absolutely foreign and incomprehensible to the Byzantines...I will not follow Frolow when he says that the wars of Heraclius against the Persians were real crusades anymore than I will acknowledge a crusading

The insulting tone of the letter, threatening all the Islamic territories, must have had an impact in Baghdad as this episode is mentioned in several Arabic sources. The Muslims were upset because the 'evil one' launched in it insult, blame, and a variety of threats and menaces. The answer to it was written by the Shaikh Abu Bakr al-Qaffāl, one of the foremost masters of Islamic law. The Byzantine patricians, marvelling at the poem, inquired about the Shaikh saying that they had no idea that there was a man like him in the land of Islam.³³⁹

Al-Qaffāl answered in a long poem:

"I have received the declarations of a man who is ignorant of the ways of speaking in dispute,

Who has fabricated titles and enumerated achievements which have no traces except in his imagination.

He called himself the pure one, while he is the most impure polytheist

And he claimed to be Christian, while in fact he is most cruel and does not act in compassion.

character to the Byzantine expeditions of the tenth century led by Nicephorus Phocas against the Muslims." In "Byzance et la croisade," X Congresso Internazionale di Scienze Storiche 3 (Sept, 1955), pp.595-620.

³³⁹Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, *Tabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya al-Kubra* (al-Husayniyya, n.d.) 1st ed., Vol. 2, pp.179-181. Von Grunebaum dates the poem to either 964-5 or 966-7. "Eine Poetische Polemik zwischen Byzanz und Bagdad in X. Jahrhundert," *Analecta Orientalia* 14 (Rome, 1937), pp.43-64. Reprinted in *Islam and Medieval Hellenism: Social and Cultural Perspectives* (Variorum reprints, London, 1976) #19.

A pure Christian King is not perfidious, impudent, and an oppressor.

Do not be arrogant and act like someone who wears a robe that does not belong to him in the midst of the brave ones.

You enumerate days long past and victories accomplished by your predecessors

There is no pride in attacking people unexpectedly, and this is done only because of your fear of being defeated.

you did not conquer Tarsus in a war and you killed the inhabitants of Massissa through treachery and this, in religion, is a great sin.

Haven't we defeated you and your country in battles which are repeated in legends?

For three hundred consecutive years we have been reaping your head with pickaxes.

And didn't we conquer the lands East and West, only the fool forgets these conquests.

The worst day for a man is when he becomes mad, oh madman in the worst sleep!

We had captured from you all that you have now captured, but with the sword, not with perfidy.

We expelled you to your land of Rum and you flew from al-Shām like an ostrich

Were it not for the commandments of the Prophet, you would not have been allowed to flee, not even on your knees

In any case, you are the defeated ones, even though you have reconquered the frontier lands because of the negligence of our

leader

We are generous in our victory, while in your victory you are
the epitome of the wicked

You say that you have defeated us because our judges are corrupt
and because they give verdicts having received bribes,

This confirms the truthfulness of our religion, because when we
are oppressors we are in our turn oppressed

You enumerated lands you want to conquer, but these wishes are
only the hopes of a dreamer

Whoever intends to conquer East and West so as to extend the
religion of the Cross holds the worst intention

Who will carry my answer to Nicephorus?

If some Arabs have repudiated Islam like animals, the Hind and
the Sind have joined Islam through the action of Manṣūr Ibn Nūḥ.

If Baghdad has become slave to its Daylami slaves, Truth has its
own partisans, *ansār*.

Who will carry my advice to Nicephorus before he regrets it

The armies of Khurasan will come to fight and the sword will be
the judge between us

We hope that with the help of God we conquer and we reach
Constantinople, *dhāt al-mahārim*

Then Nicephorus will become a slave, we will laugh and he will
repent.³⁴⁰

In this poem, we see time and again the accusations of perfidy

³⁴⁰al-Subkī, *Tabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya*, p.184.

and cowardliness of the Byzantines and their emperors. Their military victories are the result of pure treachery, in contrast to the Muslim victories. The cruelty of the Byzantines in war and their lack of compassion is signalled as uncharacteristic of Christianity. The arrogance of Nicephorus Phocas is totally unjustified as the victories that he claims are actually the work of his predecessors. Ultimately, the Muslim armies will conquer the Byzantine capital, Constantinople, and render Emperor Nicephorus a slave. In the poem there is also an explicit criticism of the Muslim rulers. The weakness of the Islamic defenses is the result of the oppression of the Muslim rulers, of the negligence of the Muslim leaders and of the corruption of the judges. Baghdad is controlled by the Buyids and hence the weakness of the Caliphate. Al-Qaffāl, who was a Shafiite jurist attacks the Shiite Buyids calling them Dailam slaves. The Buyid period was one of continuous urban crisis in Baghdad and this showed itself in frequent popular disturbances and brigandage. There was an economic decline due to government inaction and the absence of basic insecurity. The Turkish leader in Baghdad Sabuktakin, diverted the enthusiasm of the Baghdadis for *jihād* against the Byzantines into attacking the Buyids and their Daylamite and Baghadi supporters as heretics. As often is the case in the Arabs' descriptions and references to the Byzantines, implicit and explicit imageries of the Arabs are present.

Thus, we see in the references to the Byzantine emperors a

mixture of praise and derision, depending on the historical circumstances as well as on the particular relationship between the respective Muslim and Byzantine rulers. The Arab authors are particularly positive towards Emperor Heraclius who was the reigning Emperor during the Islamic expansion. This positive attitude is in direct contrast to their view of the last Byzantine emperor who is mentioned in any extensive way in the Arabic sources within our time limit, namely Nicephorus Phocas. Here the Emperor's personal traits are negative, his physical appearance is repulsive and his political and military actions are treacherous. The parallel between the two Byzantine emperors Heraclius and Nicephorus Phocas is suggestive. "Heraclius was one of the greatest rulers in Byzantine history" ³⁴¹ and Nicephorus Phocas was "un des plus illustres empereurs, un de ceux qui ont le plus contribué à maintenir glorieusement l'existence de l'empire."³⁴² The contrast in the description of Heraclius and Nicephorus Phocas in the Arabic sources is the result of many factors that reflect historical internal and external developments that occurred during these three centuries affecting both empires. Heraclius was the victorious Byzantine Emperor who succeeded in crushing the Persian armies following several decades of weakness and for the early Muslim community that had been saddened earlier at the news of previous Byzantine defeat, the triumph of Heraclius must have impressed them bringing them reason to rejoice: ..."and on that day the believers shall rejoice in

³⁴¹G. Ostrogorski, *History of the Byzantine State*, p. 92.

³⁴²G. Schlumberger, *Un Empereur Byzantin au Xème Siecle: Nicephore Phocas* (Paris, 1923), Introduction.

God's help..."³⁴³ Qur'ān exegesis emphasizes the monotheism of the Byzantines, in opposition to the Persians, as being the major reason for the Muslims' spiritual alliance with them, although there must have been political and economic reasons that backed that choice. The news of this awaited triumph must have lingered in the memory of the Muslims and reflected positively on the man who brought about this monotheist victory, namely Emperor Heraclius.

The times of Heraclius were also the times of the nascent Islamic community which still looked up towards the great civilizations of the times, especially the Persian and Byzantine. This respect was clear in the numerous borrowings and adjustments that the Muslims made to imitate some aspects of these ancient cultures and accommodate the native populations of the previous empires. The unequal beginnings reflected in what was conceived as the cultural superiority of the Byzantine Empire imposed a certain attitude of awe and respect towards the Byzantines and their emperor at the time, Heraclius.

The third point that uplifted the position of Heraclius was his supposed response to the Prophet's letter, which was courteous and in some accounts, even went to a personal allegiance to Islam, prevented only, by the objection of his subjects.

Nicephorus Phocas was also a military emperor who undertook several sweeping conquests. However, his target was the Islamic lands and to that extent, he was not going to benefit from the "rejoice of the believers" although he might win some of their respect. While Heraclius was losing against the Arabs in the

³⁴³Qur'ān, "Sūrat al-Rūm."

seventh century, the reign of Nicephorus Phocas, which witnessed the annexation of Cilicia and a large part of Syria, is in direct contrast to the defeat of Emperor Heraclius against the Muslim Arabs at Yarmük. In addition, while Heraclius' reception of the Message of Muhammad was respectful, to say the least, Nicephorus Phocas was perhaps the only Byzantine Emperor to proclaim the "propagation of the religion of the Cross" and to try to transform the Byzantine wars against the Arabs to a Holy War. He was thus rejecting Islam in its totality. The development of the image of the Byzantine emperor grows rather unnoticeably until it gradually becomes concrete and tangible as witnesses the contrast between the descriptions of Heraclius and Nicephorus Phocas. The image of the two emperors was bound to be different in time frames and general conditions that were completely different. From the positive depiction of Emperor Heraclius, we are led to a gradually developing negative imagery which reaches a climax with Nicephorus Phocas. Thus we see Ibn Nubāta pronouncing a sermon alluding to Nicephorus Phocas' assassination: "See what God has done to the Tyrant of the Rum...God was kind to you and got him killed in his own land; we do not deserve such kindness from God."³⁴⁴

³⁴⁴In M. Canard, *Saif al-Dawla*, pp.415-17.

CEREMONIAL

BYZANTINE AND MUSLIM CEREMONIAL

Ceremonials are primarily meant for the display of power, authority and wealth. In both, the Byzantine and Islamic empires, there was awareness of the implications of ceremonial, not only on the individual power of the caliph or emperor, but also on the status of their respective Empires. The most important Byzantine manual for the guidance of the masters of protocol and the courtiers, *On the Ceremonies of Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus* (905-959) states the goals of ceremonial eloquently. In the introduction to the manual the significance of the ritualistic aspects of court life is stated: they were symbolic actions which project qualities of order, awe, and dignity thus reinforcing respect for government: "Thanks to the praiseworthy ritual, the imperial power appears more majestic, grows in prestige, and at the same time, evokes the admiration of both strangers and our subjects."³⁴⁵

The ceremonial of the Byzantine court and the extensive rituals surrounding the activities of the emperor did much to impress the imperial image on the minds of the people. The Byzantines praised the Emperor as a symbol of imperial power, as an embodiment of the everlasting Empire of the Rhomaioi. The ritual

³⁴⁵A. Vogt, *Le Livre des Ceremonies* (Paris, 1953), Vol. I, p.1.

of the imperial court was a powerful vehicle of imperial propaganda aimed at the transformation of the emperor into a sacred being.³⁴⁶

The Muslims understood very early the importance of ceremonial and as their Empire expanded, they were quick to imitate the splendor that they witnessed in the previous Byzantine lands. One descriptions of such splendor occurred during the visit of the Muslim commander Khālid Ibn al-Walid(d.21/642), to the Byzantine commander, Vahan, who displayed a ceremonial that captured the imagination of the Arabs: "Vahan ordered that ten rows of Byzantine soldiers be lined up to the left and right of Khālid, masked with iron so that only their eyes could be seen. Vahan sat on a throne of gold, had on his head a golden crown ornate with precious stones, in front of him carpets and *namāriq*³⁴⁷ were spread, and next to him, Byzantine pages, *ghulmān*, were standing, carrying in their hands poles of gold and silver."³⁴⁸ The Arabs understood the purpose intended by such a display: Vahan wanted to show

³⁴⁶A. Kazhdan, "Certain Traits of Imperial Propaganda." Steven Runciman states that "almost daily there was some splendid festival or ceremony in which the emperor played a chief part. This was designed mainly to surround him with a halo of glory turning him into the symbol of the Empire." *The Emperor Romanus Lecapenus and His Reign*(Cambridge, 1988), p.15. (1st published in 1929).

³⁴⁷Singular: *namraq*. Derives from Persian to signify soft and pliable. See Shaul Shaked, "From Iran to Islam: On Some Symbols of Royalty," *Jerusalem Studies of Arabic and Islam*, 7(1986), pp.75-91.

³⁴⁸Ibn al-'A'tham, *Kitāb al-Futūh*(Haydarabad, 1975), Vol.I, pp. 239-40.

Khālid the equipment of the Byzantines in order to frighten him and then convince him more easily of his offer. However, Ibn al-‘A’tham states, Khālid was unimpressed and in his eyes the Rum remained more negligible than dogs.³⁴⁹

Nonetheless, the fact is that the Arab leaders realized the impact of such displays on their subjects and explicit statements were made to this end: the then governor of Syria, Mu‘āwiyya Ibn Abi Sufiyyān, told ‘Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb(13-23/634-644), the second Orthodox Caliph, who was shocked to see him take part in a procession and accusing him of having "a Chosroes-like way of life "that it was of great importance for the Arab ruler to appear as similar as possible to his Christian opponent.³⁵⁰ The geographer al-Maqdisī states that the Umayyad caliphs ‘Abd al-Malik(65-86/685-705) and al-Walīd(86-96/705-715) built the Dome of the Rock(691) and the Great Mosque at Damascus(706) fearing lest the Muslims be tempted away from their faith by the magnificence of the Christian churches in Syria and Palestine.³⁵¹ Al-Maqdisī had asked his uncle for the reasons that led the caliphs to spend the money of the Muslims on extravagant buildings instead of rebuilding fortresses and repairing roads...his uncle replied: "... Do you not realize that ‘Abd al-Malik, when he saw the imposing and inspiring dome of the Church of Resurrection, was afraid lest it assume an equally large place in the Muslims' heart? So he built on the rock a dome, as you

³⁴⁹Ibid., p.177.

³⁵⁰al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Rusul wal-Mulūk*, II, p. 207.

³⁵¹al-Maqdisī, *‘Ahsan al-Taqāsim*, p.159.

see.³⁵² One of the most striking legacies of the Byzantines was the policy of erecting religious imperial monuments. In the ninth century it was the turn of the Byzantines to start borrowing from the Arabs. In 835 Emperor Theophilus(829-840) [the Saracen-Minded] constructed at the gates of Constantinople a palace that imitated the palace in Baghdad. John Syncellos, the old preceptor of Theophilus, provided the description, following his stay in Baghdad as an ambassador.

Thus, early on, the Muslims tried to vie with the Byzantines in ostentation and glory. Two traditions could serve as a model to the Muslims: the Persian and the Byzantine. In the beginning, they borrowed from both, but the later Umayyads and the Abbasids adopted the Persian tradition, partly because of the enormous prestige of things oriental since the reign of al-

³⁵²Ibid. Ibn 'Asākir states that during the reign of 'Umar II, many of the lavish rituals associated with the Umayyad Caliphate were abandoned. In his attempt to enforce a more austere lifestyle, Caliph 'Umar II is said to have decided to remove the mosaics and marble tiles and the metal decorations of the Damascus Mosque. The Caliph changed his mind because of a delegation from the people of Damascus who opposed the project and also because of an incident related to a Byzantine delegation. Members of the delegation expressed surprise over the grandeur and luxury of the Mosque; the leader of the delegation is reported to have said: "We have always belittled the Arabs and have spoken of their Empire as a temporary one. But whoever built this mosque is definitely the great king of a long lasting nation." The incident seems to have convinced 'Umar II that the Mosque's lavish appearance was a weapon to be used against the enemies of Islam. See Ibn 'Asākir, *Tārikh Madinat Dimashq*, Ed. Salāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid (Damascus, al-Majma' al-'Ilmi, 1954) Vol. 2, pp. 42-43.

Walid (705–715), and partly, due to the effort of the Umayyads to differentiate themselves from their Byzantine rivals. This was part of the new culture's rejection of the habits and practices of the traditions they replaced, especially, the Byzantine one, which remained strong while ancient Iran disappeared, all but in prestige. It may be that Muslim princes gradually and consciously rejected the Byzantine ceremonial practices too closely identified with the Byzantine emperors. However, the rejection was not complete; having adopted certain themes and motifs from the Byzantine and Sassanian traditions, the Muslims created a system and vocabulary that could be understood by all similar princely realms.³⁵³ The Fatimids, coming much later, adopted the Byzantine tradition more easily, not seeing in that a threat to maintaining a separate identity since their own self definition was set against the Abbasid Caliphate.

The Muslims developed their own court ceremonials best exposed in Hilāl al-Ṣābi's *Rusūm Dār al-Khilāfa*, written around the mid-tenth century. In the introduction Hilāl al-Ṣābi' (359–448/969–1056) states:

"The Caliphate derives from the prophethood; it enjoys thereby the highest and noblest degree of dignity and excellence. The basis of its viceregency and its rules of conduct are governed by the clearest guideposts and the firmest foundations. The rules of its

³⁵³Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art* (Yale, 1987), pp.149–165 and 198–200. See also his "Notes sur les cérémonies Umayyades," *Studies in Memory of Gaston Wiet* (Jerusalem, 1977), ed. Myriam Rosen-Ayalon, pp. 51–60.

correspondence and the regulations concerning its organization are governed by the best and most elaborate methods. These ordinances are most worthy of being perpetrated and transmitted that they may serve as a reminder to him who has forgotten, a guide to the beginner, a path to the appreciation of the glory that Allah has given to the Hashemite cause and to the prestige of the Abbasid Caliphate.³⁵⁴

In the early tenth century, Byzantine ceremonial had so impressed the Muslims that when the Byzantine ambassador arrived to Baghdad, he was not allowed to get to Caliph al-Muqtadir(295-320/908-932) until the Caliph had finished decorating his palace. Al-Baghdādī and Hilāl al-Sābi' describe the pomp and ceremonial displayed for the occasion. Hilāl al-Sābi' states: "In honor of the envoy, the Residence was furnished with beautiful trappings and decorated with splendid implements. The chamberlains and their lieutenants and the retinues, in accordance with their ranks, were all in proper formation at its gates, corridors, passageways, crossways, courtyards and courts. The soldiers, of different ranks and in excellent attire, were drawn up in two lines and mounted on animals with saddles of gold and silver; and near them were the reserve horses in similar elegance, displaying many types of arms and equipment. They stretched from the upper Shammāsiyyah Gate to near the residence. Behind them stood the servants, the Caliph's private

³⁵⁴Hilāl al-Sābi', *Rusūm Dār al-Khilāfa*, ed. Mikhā'il 'Awwād (Baghdad, 1964), p.4, Trans. by Elie Salem (Beirut, 1977), p.11.

servants and outdoor servants, in elegant uniform wearing swords and gilded belts. These reached as far back as the Caliph's quarter. The markets, streets, roofs and alleys of the eastern part of the city were filled with crowds of spectators. All overlooking rooms and shops were rented for large sums of money. In the Tigris the boats were splendidly ornamented and fully equipped. The envoy and his procession walked until he reached the residence.³⁵⁵ Another ceremonial reception took place in the days of Şamşam al-Dawla in 376/986. Ward, the great Byzantine dignitary and the major rival of Emperor Basil II (976–1025), arrived to the Royal Residence. "Ward was accorded a ceremonial welcome. For his arrival, the Royal Residence was decorated with large 'Adudiyyah drapes. The elegant brocade drapes were hung at the doors of all its rooms, courtyards, passageways and corridors. The Daylamites were lined up in two rows, according to their rank, from the Tigris to the seat of Şamşam al-Dawla. They were attired in the best dress and had the most magnificent equipment and weapons... Şamşam al-Dawla sat in a golden *Sidilla* and under his great elevated seat ran a stream of water in a lead-plated bed. Golden fire burners with lighted aromatic sticks were placed before him."³⁵⁶

We also have the account of Caliph al-Nāṣir giving audience in the palace of Cordova to a Byzantine deputation. For the occasion,

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.* pp.11–12, trans., p.16–17. This was during the reign of al-Muqtadir and Constantine VII. Al Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *L'Introduction Topographique a l'Histoire de Baghdad*, text and trans. by George Salmon, pp.49–51.

³⁵⁶ *Rusūm*, *Ibid.*, pp.14–16, trans. pp.19–20.

the palace had put on a festive attire. That day 11 Rabi' 338/Sept. 8, 949, the Caliph's *khāṣṣa* were summoned for the reception... Carpets were scattered on the floor; silk tapestry covered the walls, curtains of brocade were hanging on windows and doors. seated on his throne, *sarīr*, the Caliph was surrounded by his sons and all the high dignitaries. The ambassadors were intimidated by this pompous display and delivered the letter of their sovereign to al-Nāṣir. This letter was written in Greek on a blue parchment in golden letters..."³⁵⁷

ARAB DESCRIPTIONS OF BYZANTINE CEREMONIAL

All of these accounts are reminiscent of the Byzantine ceremonial that Hārūn Ibn Yahya witnessed in Constantinople and which is found in Ibn Rustih's *Kitāb al-'A'lāq al-Nafīsa*. Hārūn described the annual religious procession of the Byzantine emperor from the Palace to the Great Church. Hārūn's description of the Emperor's procession is quite detailed. This particular ceremonial was not found in the Abbasid ceremonial and its absence may explain the great interest and attentiveness to detail that Harūn expresses. Hārūn states that in this ceremonial, the emperor orders that the way from the gate of the Palace to that of the Church be covered with mats on which are spread aromatic plants and green leaves; the walls on either side are decorated with brocade. The emperor is preceded by 10,000 men dressed in cloths of red brocade with their hair loose on their shoulders;

³⁵⁷ Ibn Ḥayyān in al-Makkāri (Paris-Leiden, 1950), pp. 235-7, trans. by Levi-Provencal, *Histoire de L'Espagne musulmane*.

walking behind them are 10,000 young men dressed in white brocade. They are followed by 10,000 adolescents dressed in green brocade and these are followed by 10,000 servants dressed in blue brocade and holding in their hands axes covered with gold. They are followed by 5,000 middle-aged eunuchs dressed in white *Khurasani malham* and holding golden crosses. In their turn these are followed by 10,000 Turkish and Khazar adolescents dressed in cuirasses made of lamella and holding in their hands lances and shields made entirely of gold. Then come one hundred great patricians dressed in colored brocade, holding golden incenses and they are followed by twelve chief patricians each holding a golden scepter. They are followed by one hundred adolescents holding a golden box which contains the robe that the emperor wears for prayer.³⁵⁸ The Emperor is dressed in his robe of feasts, a silk robe decorated with jewels. He has a crown on his head and wears a pair of shoes, one black and one red. In his hand he holds a golden box which contains dust. The emperor is preceded by the *ruhum* who silences people and by an old man holding a basin and a golden ewer ornamented with pearls and rubies. The emperor is followed by his minister who says every two steps: "remember death," stops, opens the box, looks at the dust, kisses it and cries until he reaches the Church. When he reaches the Church, the emperor washes his hands and tells his

³⁵⁸The Byzantine emperor had various robes. The one designed for feasts was the *allaximon*. During the great processions the emperors changed their robes. In two passages of *The Book of Ceremonies*, it is said that the emperor put on several costumes. A. Vogt, *Le Livre des Ceremonies*, Vol. I, pp. 17 and 20.

minister: "I am innocent of the blood of the people." The Muslim prisoners are then brought to the Church and at the sight of such magnificence and power they shout three times: "May God preserve the King for many years." A robe of honor is then bestowed on the Muslim prisoners. Behind the emperor are three well-trained grey horses with saddles ornamented with pearls and rubies. The emperor rides on them and gets into the Church. If the horse takes the bridle in his mouth, it means: "We [the Byzantines] have won a victory in the land of Islam."³⁵⁹

Like the description of Hārūn Ibn Yahyā, *The Byzantine Book of Ceremonies*, which has a chapter concerning the emperor's procession to the Great Church mentions that streets neighboring the Palace and all the avenues through which the emperor is supposed to pass are cleared and decorated; laurels, rosemary and other fragrant flowers are sprinkled. He mentions a chest which contains the imperial robe, the chamberlains responsible for presenting the water carrying the basins and the golden ewer ornated with precious stones.³⁶⁰

Al-Bakrī's description of Byzantine ceremonial is based on Hārūn Ibn Yahyā's. Although he relies on an Eastern Arabic work of the previous century, it is an indication of what was known or available in Islamic Spain in the second half of the eleventh century. One of the variants that al-Bakrī introduces are the horses involved in the procession of the emperor to the Church: "the king is followed by three horses that are led. They

³⁵⁹Ibn Rustih, *al-'Alāq al-Nafīsa*, pp.123-5

³⁶⁰A. Vogt, *Le livre des ceremonie*s, Vol. I, pp. 3-6,

say that they are the descendants of horses that belonged to Alexander.³⁶¹

Another ceremonial that Hārūn witnessed was the reception of the Muslim prisoners: on Christmas day, when the emperor leaves the church, he enters a hall which contains a table of wood, another of ivory and a third of gold. The Muslim prisoners are brought to him and they are made to sit at these tables. Four golden trays are brought to him on chariots, trays that had belonged to the prophets Sulaimān, Dā'ūd, Qārūn³⁶² and Constantine. A great variety of cold and hot plates are laid and the imperial herald swears by the life of the Emperor that the food contains no pork. The food is carried to the Muslim prisoners on golden and silver plates and the organ is then brought in. Twenty people enter with their cymbals and they play as long as the guests continue to eat. The guests are fed in this way for twelve days and on the last day each Muslim captive is given two dinars and three dirhams. ³⁶³

³⁶¹al-Bakrī, *Jughrāfiyat al-'Andalus wa Urūba*, p.198. See Manuela Marin, "Rum in the Work of Three Spanish Muslim Geographers," *Greaco-Arabica* 3(1984), pp.109-117.

³⁶²Qārūn Occurs in the Qur'ān: xxviii, 76-82, where he is the Biblical Korah(Num. xvi) and he behaves proudly towards the people of Mūsa because of his immense wealth of which he makes a great public display. One of the development of this legend was that he has become one of the founders of alchemy. D. B. MacDonald, "Qarun," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, first edition, pp.780-781. *Al Munjid fi al-lugha* states that Qārūn is the arabization of the name Crezus, the last king of Lyddia who was famous for his enormous wealth.

³⁶³Ibn Rustih, *al-'A'lāq al-Nafīsa*, pp.122-123.

In the descriptions of the imperial procession, both accounts in Ibn Rustih and al-Bakrī emphasize the externals of Byzantine power: pomp, wealth, and the number of people partaking in the ceremonial. Harūn states explicitly that it was a sight "of great magnificence and power." What comes across is the view of a state and civilization of great importance. The image of a powerful Byzantium survived in the writings of the Arab authors far a long time. The prestige of the Byzantine Empire, the single great non-Muslim power of the Muslim world picture had a certain timelessness.

The Arabs were impressed by the ceremonial that took place at the court of the Byzantine Emperor. At this court, the Muslim ambassador of Caliph 'Umar Ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz (99-101/717-720) saw the Byzantine Emperor sitting, crowned, on his throne, the patricians on his left and right and people according to their ranks in front of him.³⁶⁴ The elaborateness of ceremonial at the Byzantine court is described at great length by 'Umāra Ibn Hamzah, who witnessed it in his capacity of ambassador:

"I reached a place from which the man, [the emperor] was hidden at a great distance." 'Umāra sat waiting and had to ask permission to advance at three different times and places. He then reached the court but his way was blocked by two lions who quieted down as soon as 'Umāra came close to them. As he entered another court, two clashing swords blocked his way. He finally passed to the third court where the emperor was.³⁶⁵

³⁶⁴ al-Mas'ūdī, *Muṣūd*, Vol. 2, p.18.

³⁶⁵ Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, p.137.

‘Umāra describes the reception hall of the Byzantine emperor: it was such a wide hall that he could barely see him. As he walked one third of the distance, a red cloud covered him preventing him from seeing. When the cloud passed, he walked and a green cloud covered him again veiling his sight. When it passed he walked up to the emperor.³⁶⁶ This reflects the combination of tricks used at the Byzantine court to impress visitors. The historian al-Ṭabārī has preserved the account of Emperor Michael III (842–867) who did not even address the ambassador of al-Mutawwakil (847–861), Naṣr Ibn al-Azhar: "The king was on a platform and the patricians were standing around him. I saluted him and was seated at the edge of the great platform. I displayed the gifts in front of him. The Emperor had an interpreter in front of him, a slave... The emperor accepted my gifts and my offer of a reciprocal oath. the maternal uncle of the king who was responsible for the affairs of the Empire took the oath instead of Michael. I said: "Oh King, I have received the oath of your uncle, does this promise bind you? He nodded affirmatively with his head. I did not hear him say a word from my first appearance into Byzantine territory and until I left. Only the interpreter spoke, the Emperor only moving his head to signify yes or no. He never spoke."³⁶⁷

However, while the preceding descriptions show the Byzantine emperor surrounded by such awesome ceremonial that make him

³⁶⁶Ibid., pp.137-8

³⁶⁷al-Ṭabārī, *Tārīkh al-Rusul wal-Mulūk*, Tertia Series, III, pp.1450–1451.

inaccessible, in other descriptions by Arab authors, he is depicted as approachable, communicating with the Arabs in a friendly way, smiling sympathetically and even laughing. One such instance occurred when 'Ubāda Ibn al-Sāmit entered to the presence of the Byzantine Emperor attired with his turban and carrying his sword. The Byzantine Emperor, who was eloquent in Arabic, asked, laughing, about the reason for not being saluted in the way the Arabs salute each other. He then inquired about conditions in the Muslim lands.³⁶⁸

A story that is found in al-Maqarri (1591-1632) quoting Ibn Hayyān (XIth century) and that describes the reception of the ambassador al-Ghazāl by Emperor Theophilus (829-842) points to the complete absence of ceremonial in the interchange between the Emperor and the Arab ambassador sent by the Cordovan Amir 'Abd al-Rahmān II (206-238/822-852). Emperor Theophilus showed real interest in art and learning and was alive to the cultural influences of the Islamic civilization: "His reign was the period when Muslim culture exercised its strongest influence on the Byzantine world."³⁶⁹ The account relates a conversation which took place in the palace between al-Ghazāl and the Byzantine Emperor and Empress Theodora. The Emperor invited at his table al-Ghazāl who refused on the pretext that Islam forbids alcoholic beverages. As the Emperor was speaking, al-Ghazāl became distracted by the entrance of Empress Theodora adorned, with her jewelry and in her most beautiful attire. The Emperor asked

³⁶⁸ Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, p. 141.

³⁶⁹ G. Ostrogorski, *History of the Byzantine State*, p. 206.

his translator to explain this unwonted attitude and al-Ghazāl answered: "the beauty of the Queen, *malika*, has dazzled me to an extent that prevents me from listening to you; such astonishing beauty recalls the beauty of the *hūris* of paradise." The author states that the worth of al-Ghazāl increased in the Emperor's eyes while the empress was delighted. This account projects a personable view of the interchange which could be, at times, even intimate. The Byzantine imperial ceremonial seems practically absent and al-Ghazāl is allowed to express his genuine admiration for Empress Theodora in front of the Emperor. The Muslim ambassador indulged himself in a poem he composed at the occasion of Theodora's visit along with her son at al-Ghazāl's quarters:

"....His mother, she too, daughter of Ceasars
Upon seeing the color of her face one would think
It was of silver or gold artfully polished..."³⁷⁰

The Byzantine imperial insignia in the ceremonies were primarily related to clothing: shoes, a golden scarf adorned with precious stones, the crown, a golden cross and the *akakia*. In addition, there were objects which preceded the emperor and followed him such as banners and lances and shields. Ibn Khurdadhbēh's list of the imperial insignia in the Byzantine ceremonial includes the throne of gold, the crown, the purple silk which "is a kind of silk with a black twinkling," and the red

³⁷⁰From the French trans. by Levi Provencal, *Histoire de l'Espagne musulmane*.

shoes. He states that any other person who wore the red shoes was to be killed; only the heir apparent wore a red shoe and a black shoe.³⁷¹ Ibn al-Faqih reports that the Byzantine Emperor had purple clothes and everything around him was purple.³⁷² Color was also a serious tool of imperial propaganda. The Byzantines developed a sophisticated hierarchy of colors and to the top rung of this hierarchic ladder belonged purple and gold, two colors which were restricted to the monopolistic use of the emperor. They symbolized respectively life and power, the sacred and the mighty, in Byzantine ceremonial.³⁷³

The dress code of the Byzantine emperor with his various robes constituted an essential prop of the Byzantine ceremonial. The Arab authors knew of the different robes that the Byzantine emperors displayed during the various ceremonials. The author of *Kitāb al-Dhakha'ir wal Tuḥaf* mentions different robes that the Byzantine emperors used on different occasions: "When the emperor is travelling, he wears a precious robe ornamented with precious stones and pearls of all kinds. Each such robe is worth 20,000 dinars." Abu al-Fadl saw Emperor Michael wearing one

³⁷¹al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbīh*, pp.109 and 172. The insignia of the Abbasids were mainly the scepter, the seal and the cloak of the Prophet, in addition to the banners, the parasol and the *tāj*. See Marius Canard, "Le ceremonial fatimide et le ceremonial byzantin," *Byzantion* 21(1955), pp.355-420.

³⁷²Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, p.141.

³⁷³Kazhdan, "Certain Traits of Imperial Propaganda." The dye recipe based on madder, remained for a long time the specialty of Constantinople, furnishing the color called, "imperial purple."

during his travels and encampments and noticed that the Emperor changed his cloths frequently. On the occasion of the Great Feast the Emperor was wearing a robe which was hard to lift due to the weight of the 3000 grains of pearls, each weighing one *mithqāl*.³⁷⁴ "The robe is priceless and unique on earth."³⁷⁵

The emperor also wore different crowns for different occasions. "One is the great crown of gold adorned with rubies and other precious stones which is suspended over his head when the emperor is receiving his own people and foreign ambassadors. Another famous crown is the one that he wears when he comes back from a victory. It is ornamented with precious stones and has a crest made of red rubies."³⁷⁶ As for the imperial throne, "it is made of gold and is ornamented with precious stones. The emperor's feet rest on a canopy of profusely worked brocade."³⁷⁷ The importance bestowed on the precious tissues was an expression of hierarchy through the costume, an instrument of a "politique de prestige" which was shared by the Sassanian and Byzantine traditions as well as by the Muslims later on. In the Byzantine court, the etiquette was indeed

³⁷⁴The *mithqāl* corresponds to the Roman solidus of the Constantinian system which the Arabs adopted in Syria. Caliph 'Abd al-Malik took it over for his unit of gold when he reformed the currency in 77/696. His *dīnār* weighed a *mithqāl* of 65.5 grains. Hence *mithqāl* is used synonymous for *dinār*. See J. Allan, "Mithqal," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, first edition, p. 528.

³⁷⁵*al-Dhakhā'ir wal-Tuḥaf*, p.197. Abu al-Fadl Ibrāhīm came back from Constantinople in 463/1070 during the reign of the Byzantine Emperor Romanos IV Diogenes(1068-71).

³⁷⁶Ibid., p.197.

³⁷⁷Ibid.

rigorous.³⁷⁸

One of the bones of contention between the Muslims and the Byzantines was the ceremonial of proskenysis. The proskenisis, introduced, most probably, apparently by Emperor Justinian I (527-565) from the Persian ceremonial, became a rule in the Byzantine court: *The Book of Ceremonies* states that each person has to prosterinate, in front of the emperor. The only exception to this rule was the patriarch.³⁷⁹ Initially, the Muslims regarded kissing the ground in front of a human being a blasphemy. "It was not the practice of old for an 'amir, a wazir or a high dignitary to kiss the ground when he entered the presence of the caliph. But when he entered and saw the caliph, he would address him in the second person singular saying: Peace be upon you, O commander of the Faithful, and may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon you."³⁸⁰ The caliph sometimes offered his hand, covered with his sleeve, to an 'amir or a wazir to kiss. Now, according to Hilāl al-Šabi', this practice has been replaced by kissing the ground "and to this rule all people comply." In the past, the crown princes, the judges, jurists, ascetics and the readers of the Qur'an kissed neither the hand nor the ground. They merely saluted...Now, however, they have joined the others in kissing the ground, except for a few who avoid this practice. Those of middle and low ranks, those below,

³⁷⁸ Maurice Lombard, *Les Textiles dans le Monde Musulman du VIIème au XIIème Siècle* (Paris, new York, 1978), p.197.

³⁷⁹ Rodolphe Guillard, *Recherches sur les Institutions Byzantines* (Amsterdam, 1967), Vol. I, pp.144-150.

³⁸⁰ *Rusūm Dār al-Khilāfa*, p.29.

the general public, and people without social status, are considered too low to partake in the honor of kissing the ground.³⁸¹ However, in the texts we have stories that show that the Muslims did not practice proskenyisis in the context of their relations with the Byzantines. It is again Hilāl al-Ṣābi' who mentions that the Byzantine ambassador standing before Caliph al-Muqtadir in 305/912 did not kiss the ground as the Muslims were excused this part of the court etiquette in Byzantium. The Byzantine dignitary Ward, approached Ȧamsām al-Dawlah and his greeting "did not involve more than a slight bow and the kissing of his hand."³⁸²

Al-Baghdādī refers to the Byzantine ambassador who told al-Muqtadir: "Had I known that the Caliph would want me to kiss the carpet, I would have done it although your ambassador is never asked to for it is in conformity to our protocol."³⁸³ The Arabs thus rejected in principle the ceremony of proskenyisis. The Byzantines were aware of the Arabs' revulsion for the practice and did not ask the Muslim ambassadors to prosternate and kiss the ground. Al-Ghazāl, the ambassador of 'Abd-al-Rahmān II(206-238/822-852) refused to prosternate himself in front of Emperor Theophilus(829-42) alleging that a Muslim prosternate himself only in front of the Creator. The Byzantines then used a subterfuge: they walled up the entrance door to the courtroom so

³⁸¹Ibid., pp. 29-30.

³⁸²Ibid., p. 20.

³⁸³Al-Baghdādī, *L'Introduction Topographique*, p.56. See also A. El Hajjī, *Diplomatic Relations with Western Europe During the Umayyad Period* (Beirut, 1970).

that al-Ghazāl would be obliged to stoop which and that would be equivalent to a prostration. Realizing the trick, al-Ghazāl sat down stretching out his legs and entered the imperial presence backward.³⁸⁴

WEALTH AS CEREMONIAL

The most important aspect intended to be reflected in ceremonial was the power of the ruler and of his empire. This power was shown through different means, especially, was through the display of wealth. This was indeed what struck the Arab authors most in their description of the Byzantine ceremonial and in their references to contacts with the Byzantine emperors. In Hārūn's description of the Emperor's procession to the Great Church, the single word that was used repeatedly was gold: "...the hand axes were covered with gold... golden crosses...lances and shields made entirely of gold...golden incensers...golden scepter...golden box..." The wealth was furthermore reflected in the precious stones that decorated the emperors' crowns, robes, thrones...Empress Theodora, wife of Emperor Theophilus(829-842) gave al-Ghazāl a priceless pearl necklace. It is said that this is where the origin of his fortune began. Ibn al-Faqīh refers to a much earlier time when the Ceasar sent to Qibādh, the Sassanian King(488-531) a lot of gifts which included a large tent made of brocade and a casket full of jewels.³⁸⁵ Thus Hārūn describes what seems to be an

³⁸⁴Levi-Provencal, *Histoire de L'Espagne Musulmane*.

interminable supply of precious stones. Gold was believed to be an endless source of the Byzantine emperors were thought to convert copper to gold.

Wealth reflected power and that was made clear in a statement by Caliph al-Ma'mūn(198-218/813-3) who told his advisors to send a gift to the Byzantine Emperor one hundred times more precious than his, so that the emperor may know the power of Islam and God's favor to the Muslims.³⁸⁶ Not only the Byzantines , but also all those allied with them get a share of the wealth and honor. Abu Ḥarītha, the Bishop of the Christian community of Najrān was honored by the Byzantine emperors who paid him a subsidy, gave him servants and built him churches. Although Abu Ḥarītha believed in Muḥammad's prophethood he refrained from accepting his Message. This was so "because of the way these people [the Rum] have treated me, giving me titles, paying me subsidies and honoring me. The Rum are absolutely opposed to the Prophet and if I were to accept him, they would take from me all what you see."³⁸⁷ Thus, one of the most knowledgeable authorities among the Christians, for "Abu Ḥarītha was a scholar and had great knowledge and zeal for his religion,"³⁸⁸ did not adopt Islam, although convinced of its truthfulness, because of the wealth and honor lavished on him by the Byzantines. Later on, and in another context, Ḥudhaifa Ibn

³⁸⁵ Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, p.137.

³⁸⁶ *Al-Dhakhā'ir wal-Tuḥaf*, p. 28.

³⁸⁷ *Sīrat Muḥammad* , trans. by A. Guillaume, pp. 270-1.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

al-Yaman(d.36/656) expressed great astonishment at the wealth and ceremonial of the Ghassanid prince Jabala Ibn al-'Aham who had abandoned Islam and had become a close advisor and minister of Emperor Heraclius. Hudhaifa states that he did not see as many slaves and servants at the gate of emperor Heraclius than at the gates of Jabala. He describes the throne of Jabala: It was made of precious stones and had four supports, 'arkān, of gold and four of silver. He also had a golden crown.³⁸⁹

The Byzantine emperors and the caliphs vied with each other on the political, military, economic and cultural levels and this involved the exchange of expensive and extraordinary gifts. Al-Mubarrad conserves in his *al-Kāmil* the account of a Byzantine emperor who sent to Mu'awiyya(41-60/661-680) a giant man and another who was extremely strong. However, Mu'awiyya was able to produce two men both taller and stronger.³⁹⁰ In another anecdote, requesting a young girl who was captured in Heraclea, Emperor Nicephorus I(802-811) sent to Hārūn al-Rashīd 50,000 dinars together with one hundred robes of brocade and one hundred robes embroidered with silk brocade, *bazyūn*, twelve falcons, four hunting dogs and three pack horses.³⁹¹ Emperor Constantine IX Monomachus(1042-1055) is said to have sent to the Fatimid caliph al -Mustansir in 1045 a gift the like of which no other Byzantine emperor had ever sent.³⁹²

³⁸⁹Ibn al-'A'ham , *Kitāb al-Futūh*, Vol.I, p. 305.

³⁹⁰al-Mubarrad, *al-Kāmil*, p.296.

³⁹¹al-Ṭabarī, *Tārikh al-Rusul wal Mulūk*, Tertia Series, II, pp.710-11.

³⁹²al-*Dhakhā'ir wal-Tuḥaf*, pp.74-5.

There are numerorus similar exchanges in the Arabic sources.

Coins were widely used as a vehicle of propaganda in Byzantium, a function that was performed in Byzantium first and foremost by gold.³⁹³ The earliest gold coinage of Caliph 'Abd al-Malik (65-86/685-705) was Byzantine in design and reflected the pervasive influence of Byzantine imperial concepts, in administrative and economic life as well as in prestige. "For the people of Baghdad, Byzantium had from the onset been the mirage of a piece of gold, the minting of which was reserved to the basileus."³⁹⁴ At the birth of Islam, the greatest stock of minted money in the world was still in Byzantium. Byzantium kept its minted stock practically intact from 696 to 1204 and remained in this way, "the sacred piece of gold exciting magic and covetousness."³⁹⁵

Again, with respect Byzantium's wealth, the Arab authors are once more ambiguous. For while they are impressed by the infinite wealth of the Byzantines and describe manifestations of this wealth at length, yet, at other times, they dismiss the importance of Byzantine wealth altogether upholding the muslim ideals of poverty, egalitarianism, and humility. Sharp and severe accusations were pointed at this wealth amassed at the expense of the poor. This attitude is well illustrated in the Books

³⁹² *al-Dhakhā'ir wal-Tuḥaf*, pp.74-5.

³⁹³ A. Kazhdan, "Certain Traits of Imperial Propaganda..." See also Alfred Bellinger, "The Coins and Byzantine Imperial Policy," *Speculum*, vol. 31, pp.70-81.

³⁹⁴ L. Massignon, "Le Mirage Byzantin..."

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

of Conquest such as *Kitāb Futūh al-Shām* of Muḥammad al-Azdī and *Kitāb al-Futūh* of Ibn al-‘A‘tham al-Kufī (d. ca. 314/926). In *Kitāb Futūh al-Shām* there is an encounter between Mu‘ādh Ibn Jabal (d. 18/629), the messenger of ‘Abu-‘Ubaida Ibn al-Jarrāḥ (d. 19/639), the great military leader of the early Islamic conquests, with the Byzantine patricians who were lying on luxiourious couches on which Mu‘ādh refused to sit because he did not want to walk on carpets and sit on *namāriq* which "you have withheld from the weak Byzantines." He chose, instaed, to sit on the floor neglecting "these vanities and worldly possessions."³⁹⁶ We also get a reverse story. The Byzantine messenger who was sent to ‘Abu-‘Ubaida was unable to recognize the Muslim ‘Amir in the Muslim camp. ‘Abu ‘Ubaida, sitting on the floor and not wearing the cloths of princes was non identifiable.³⁹⁷

Caliph ‘Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (13-23/634-44) scolded the Muslims wearing brocade, *dibāj*, which they had gotten from the spoils of their victories against Byzantium. He tore their brocade and said: "you are wearing brocade and that is a sin, *ḥarām*; and he quoted the Prophet: gold and silk are *ḥarām* for the males of my nations, lawful, *ḥalāl* for its females."³⁹⁸ The manifested ambivalence with respect to Byzantine wealth was due to the

³⁹⁶ al-Azdī, *Kitāb Futūh al-Shām*, pp. 101-102. also Ibn al-‘A‘tham , *Kitāb al-Futūh*, Vol. 1, p.179.

³⁹⁷ al-‘Azdī, *Kitāb Futūh al-Shām*, p.107 and Ibn al-‘A‘tham, *Kitāb al-Futūh*, Vol. 1, p.184.

³⁹⁸ Ibn al-‘A‘tham, *Kitāb al-Futūh*, Vol. I, p. 295.

projection into the past of the ideal Muslim community. A good example of the contrast between the simplicity of earlier times and the grandeur of later times is provided by, on the one hand, the Byzantine ambassador who found Caliph 'Umar Ibn al-Khattab sleeping on the floor and on the other, by al-Muqtadir's reception of the Byzantine ambassador in Baghdad

In other contexts, however, Arab authors point to the actual poverty of the Byzantine Empire as compared with the wealth of the Muslim Caliphate: "the revenues of the land of the Rum are far less than half of the taxes levied in the Maghrib."³⁹⁹ Here we find both an ambivalent attitude towards wealth but also an uncertainty with respect to the actual facts of the situation. Both the moral ambivalence and the ignorance of the actual facts are intermingled and lead the Arab authors who address this issue to a vague and unclear position. Although we are left with ambiguity, the magnificence and wealth of the Byzantines does come out as a salient characteristic of the Arabs' descriptions of the Byzantine Empire.

LANGUAGE AS CEREMONIAL

Ignorance of another group's language constitutes the most obvious barrier to communication and therefore the most obvious definer of the lines which separate the groups. We do find, however, instances where there is reciprocal knowledge of the

³⁹⁹ Ibn Hawqal, *Kitāb Sūrat al-'Ard*, p.197. Al-Bairūnī supplies a different list for the political ranks in the Byzantine administration. See *Al-'Athār al-Bāqiyā 'an al-Qurūn al-Khāliyya*, Ed. Aduard sachau (Leipzig, 1923) p. 89.

both Arabic and Greek. Such knowledge does not only help in better understanding the Other, but it constitutes one variable in the power/knowledge equation. Until the reign of Caliph 'Abd al-Malik (65–86/685–705), Greek remained the language of the administration and of the tax-register, *diwān*, in Damascus.

According to Balādhuri the *naql al-diwan* took place in 700/81;⁴⁰⁰ the reason given by the early Arabic sources was that a Greek clerk had urinated in an ink-pot. As late as the tenth century we find the historian Ḥamzah al-Īsfahānī (d. 350/961) using directly Greek historical writing concerning the Byzantine emperors with the help of a Greek-speaking servant at the court of Iṣfahān.⁴⁰¹ There were translators with a reasonably good knowledge of the Greek language far into Islamic times.

The first section of the *Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm describes the "languages of the peoples, Arabs and foreign, the characteristics of their methods of writing, their types of script and forms of calligraphy."⁴⁰² He mentions four different Greek scripts used by the Rum in Baghdad. The first script is called *lepton* and it is equivalent, in Arabic, to the script used by the *warraqūn*, the professional scribes, copying manuscripts of the Qur'ān. The Rum also write their holy script with it. They also have a script which is the equivalent of the *thuluth* Arabic script.⁴⁰³ The

⁴⁰⁰ Balādhuri, *Futūh al-Buldān*, p. 271.

⁴⁰¹ Ḥamzah al-Īsfahānī, *Tarīkh Sīnī Mu'lūk al-'Ard*, p. 70.

⁴⁰² Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, p. 9. Bayard Dodge, *The Fihrist of al-Nadim*, (New York, 1970), Vol. I, p. 3.

⁴⁰³ *Thuluth* was mainly used for decorative purposes in manuscripts and inscriptions. The *muhaqqaq* became the

third script the Rum have is the *suritūn* which is the *muḥaqqaq* script of the *kuttāb*, the secretaries, and it is used for official correspondence. The Rum have a fourth script known as *sāmiya* which does not resemble anything the Arabs have for as single one if its letters combines many meanings and abbreviates a number of words. It is learned by the kings and the most eminent scribes; the rest of the people are prevented from using it because of its majesty.⁴⁰⁴

Certain Greek terms were arabized especially terms related to types of clothes, weights, measurements, medical and botanical names, Christian terms and Byzantine titles.⁴⁰⁵ Two such words were the title of *batriq*, which stands for patrician or patriarch and the term *bazyūn* which most probably derives from the adjectives *buzinon* or *bussion* and was a kind of silk brocade of Byzantine manufacture imitated in the Muslim world.⁴⁰⁶ The foreign elements that may be found in the work of Sibawaih and other earlier grammarians should be attributed to direct contact with living Greek grammar whereas later authors in the Baghdadian period underwent the influence of translated Greek writings. And indeed the Arabs knew not only Greek, but the system of Greek grammar as it was taught at the Byzantine

favorite style of the professional scribes and it became an extremely popular script for copying Qur'ans. For the various Arabic scripts see Yasin H. Safadi, *Islamic Calligraphy* (London, 1978).

⁴⁰⁴ Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, p. 29.

⁴⁰⁵ Ahmad Amin, *Duḥa al-Islam* (Cairo, 1961), p. 28.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, p. 50.

universities. Hunain Ibn Ishāq(808-873), who was behind the translation of many works of the Greek legacy into Syriac and Arabic, spent some years in Constantinople studying Greek and in later times we hear that the Byzantine scholar Psellos had Arab students among his pupils. We have the name of at least one Arab from Baghdad who studied in Constantinople at this time(about 1050/440): Abu'l Hasan al Mukhtār.⁴⁰⁷

Language is a form of ceremonial serving as it does to display authority and impose control. This was immediately reflected in the exchange of letters between emperors and caliphs where by all were trying to uphold a protocol that benefited their image. Thus Al-Ma'mūn(198-218/813-833) refused to read the letter of Emperor Theophilus(829-842) because it started with the Emperor's name. The Caliph told the Byzantine messenger: "Don't you know that I am older than him, even some of my children are older than he is...Furthermore, even if we were equal in religion, he ought to give me precedence, for I am a caliph, my father is al-Rashīd, my grandfather is al-Mahdī, and the maternal uncle of my father is Abu al-Mansūr. I am the son of caliphs...How can he then start with his name?" The Byzantine ambassador answered: "whoever sits on a king's throne becomes the equal of other kings."⁴⁰⁸ The historian Ya'qūbī mentions this letter and states that Emperor Theophilus (829-842) made the concession demanded and wrote back: "To the servant of God,

⁴⁰⁷C.H.M. Versteegh, *Greek Elements in Arabic Linguistic Thinking*(Leiden, 1977).

⁴⁰⁸Ibn al-'A'tham, *Kitāb al-Futūh*, Vol. 8, pp. 335-6.

most honorable among men, king of the Arabs, from Theophilus, king of the Rum.⁴⁰⁹ Emperor Romanus Lecapenus (920-44) and his sons Constance and Stephan also sent a precious gift along with a letter to Caliph al-Mahdi Billah in 326/938. The Greek writing was in gold and its Arabic translation was in silver and the letter started with: "From Romanos, Stephan, Constantine, believers in God, leaders of the Byzantines, to the noble lord, holder of the authority of the Muslims," and ended with the following: "...and since we have a solid friendship and a sincere knowledge of you, we have sent to you, who are issued from the highest descendance, a superb object...May God make the king of the Byzantines powerful."⁴¹⁰ Thus, both the Byzantine and the Muslim ceremonial was partly embodied in words; in addition to such letters, acclamations, official speeches, inscriptions, panegyrics, all contributed to the creation of the ideal image of the Islamic state and caliph and the Byzantine empire and emperor.⁴¹¹

We find in various anecdotes references to a definite and close knowledge of the Other's language in literary and religious conversations. The Byzantine patrician of Burgān asked his Arab prisoner to recite to him the sūra of "Al-'Umrān" from the Qur'ān and verses of Arabic poetry and congratulated him for his eloquence; when the Arab prisoner asked the patrician to which Arab tribe he belonged, the patrician answered that he was not Arab and that the knowledge of a language does not determine

⁴⁰⁹Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, Vol. 2, p. 465.

⁴¹⁰*Al-Dhakhā'ir wal-Tuḥaf*, p. 68.

⁴¹¹See A. Kazhdan, "Certain Traits..."

Greek which equalled the patrician's eloquence in Arabic.⁴¹² This anecdote reflects a more widespread knowledge of the respective languages of the interlocutors than can be suspected, for their surprise centered around the eloquence of the speeches rather than on the simple and basic knowledge of Greek and Arabic. Furthermore, among the many references to Emperor Nicephorus I(802-811) by the Arab authors, one states that the Byzantine Emperor had heard the poetry of Abu al-'Atāhiya through one of his ambassadors and memorized some verses. He then wrote to Hārūn al-Rashīd and asked him to send to Constantinople the famous Arab poet offering to free Muslim prisoners in return. Abu al-'Atāhiya refused to go and later on, the Emperor engraved two verses by Abu al-'Atāhiya on the doors of his reception hall and on the gate of Constantinople.⁴¹³

Most of the information we have concerning the literary achievements of the Rum appear within the intellectual discussion that accompanied the Shu'ūbī movement. The great work of al-Jāhiẓ, *al-Bayān wal Tabyīn* was set within this great polemic where in attempting to respond to the Shu'ubite claims, al-Jāhiẓ strove continuously to demonstrate the superiority of the Arabic language. He did not hesitate to undervalue the language and literature of other peoples. Al-Jāhiẓ established some literary and linguistic parallels that exist between the four Civilized

⁴¹²al-Tanukhī, *Al Faraj Ba'da al Shidda*, Vol. 2, p. 194.

⁴¹³*Kitāb al-Aghānī*, Vol. 3, p.179. Abu al-'Atāhiya(748-825) was a poet at the courts of the caliphs al-Mahdī, al-Hadī and especially at the court of Harūn al-Rashīd.

Nations, i.e., the Indians, the Persians, the Arabs and the Byzantines. These are the nations that, in his mind, possessed ethics, wisdom, literature and science. The rest were the barbarians, savages, or semi-savages.⁴¹⁴

Al-Tawhīdī, praising the Arabic language, commented on other languages: "We have heard many languages like the language of the 'Ajām, of the Rum, of the Indians of the Turks..., and we did not find in anyone of these the purity of Arabic, that is the opening that is its words."⁴¹⁵ In *Kitāb al-'Akhbār wa kaifa Taṣuḥ*, al-Jāhīz said that the Arabs are distinguished by the wealth of their language and their oratory skills and poetry and denies the Greek any poetic ability.

Al-Jāhīz attempted to define *balāgha* and resorts to definitions given by ancient Greeks, the Byzantines and the Indians. He compared between the art of rhetoric, *balāgha*, of the Persians and the Byzantines, on the one hand, and that of the Arabs, on the other, and stated that while the former emanates from thinking and vision, the latter is the result of spontaneous intuition and presence of mind.⁴¹⁶

Al-Jāhīz acknowledged certain techniques and aptitudes to the civilized nations. Thus the Persians are the best orators and the ancient Greeks excel in logic and philosophy. However, with respect to literature, there is no doubt that the Arabs are superior to all others. For al-Jāhīz, literature was, before

⁴¹⁴ Al-Jāhīz, *al-Bayān wal-Tabyīn*, Vol. 1, Book 2, p. 384.

⁴¹⁵ Al-Tawhīdī, *Al-'Imtā' wal Mu'ānasa*, p. 77.

⁴¹⁶ Al-Jāhīz, *Kitāb al-Bayān wal Tabyyīn*, Vol. 3, p. 6.

anything else, poetry and oratorial art.⁴¹⁷ There is, he stated, a huge abyss between Arabic poetry and what the Persians and the Byzantines call poetry: Byzantine poetry, in particular, has no meter or rhymes and cannot be compared to Arabic poetry.⁴¹⁸ Furthermore, oratorial art belongs only to the Arabs and the Persians.⁴¹⁹ The Byzantines are thus left with no literature worthy of any mention since they lack, according to al-Jāhīz, both poetry and oratorial skills. This may partially explain the general tendency of the Arabs to translate Greek scientific texts or otherwise useful Greek books and to ignore great works of literature both in ancient Greek and Byzantine Greek. The Arabs felt that their literature was unequalled and there was thus little need to borrow literary texts of any sort.

This is however a complex issue as there are several agents and factors involved in the translation movement which affected its orientation and the selection of Greek texts. The established view that "neither Greek poetry nor artistic prose was ever translated into classical Arabic,"⁴²⁰ has been recently challenged. Thomas Hagg has pointed out that a factor which limited the scope of the translation movement besides utilitarianism was the choice that the Syriac translators imposed. They did, for instance,

⁴¹⁷ See article by Charles Pellat, "Djahiz et la Litterature Comparée," *Cahiers algeriens de literature comparée*, 1(1966), pp. 95-108.

⁴¹⁸ A-Jāhīz, *al-Bayān*, Kitab 2, Vol.2, pp.384-385.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., Kitāb 2, Vol.3, pp. 27-29.

⁴²⁰ R. Walzer, *Greek into Arabic: Essays on Islamic Philosophy* (Oxford, 1962), p.162.

reject a large mass of Greek belles-lettres which had its basis in pagan mythology.⁴²¹ Nevertheless, some literary texts did find their way into Arabic. The Alexander Romance of pseudo Callisthenes was translated into Arabic from Pahlavi via Syriac in the ninth century. Furthermore, Hagg presents a good case for a ninth century Arabic intermediary between the ancient Greek novel Metiochus and Parthenope and the eleventh century Persian verse romance Vamiq and Adhra composed by Unsuri.⁴²²

Translation touched upon all the intellectual domains except poetry. The real difficulties of translating Greek poetry may have been sufficient to shy away attempts at such undertakings. Was it because of negligence or because of failure to do so? was there an incompatibility of temperament or an incomprehension?⁴²³ Literature and especially poetry are both personal and culture-bound. It is difficult to appreciate an alien aesthetic and in this particular case it could offer no moral guidance.

The Byzantine State had an impressive past in terms of power, wealth and culture. The Byzantines were masters at ceremonial. By emphasizing the strength and prestige of the Byzantine Empire, the Muslim authors were raising their states to the same level. And same level they were. Byzantium granted the Arabs preeminence: in the protocols of Emperor Constantine

⁴²¹Thomas Hagg, "The Oriental Reception of Greek Novels," *Symbolae Osloences* 61(1986), pp. 99-131.

⁴²²Ibid.

⁴²³Gaston Wiet, "Les Traducteurs Arabes et la Poesie Grecque," *Mélanges de l'Université Saint Joseph*, 38/16(1962), pp. 361-369.

Porphyrogenitus (905-959) we find very cordial formulas for the reception of the ambassadors from Baghdad and Cairo. At the imperial table, Byzantine ceremonial put the Muslim "friends" in a higher place than the Frankish "friends" and among the Muslims, those of the East had the better place.⁴²⁴

The Abbasid Caliphate was the greatest challenge to the Byzantine Empire. Umayyad Spain and later on, the Fatimids, tried to establish diplomatic relations with Byzantium. In all of these cases the Muslims were entering relations of equality which enhanced their positions as great powers and upheld their prestige. Thus, elaborating and even exaggerating the power of Byzantium contributed to the self-esteem of the Muslim states and reflected positively on their actions.⁴²⁵ However, this does not detract from the effectiveness and power of ceremonial in both empires. The Muslims, grasped the meanings intended by the Byzantine ceremonials, described some of their aspects praising some and deligitimizing others. All the images of splendor and wealth of the Byzantine Empire had the intended impact on the Arabs who admired the elaborate Byzantine ceremonial.

⁴²⁴In Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, H. Gregoire and M. Canard (Bruxelles, 1935), Vol. I, p. 12

⁴²⁵See David Wasserstein, "Byzantium and al-Andalus," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 2 (1987), pp. 76-101.

THE IMAGE OF CONSTANTINOPLE AND THE EMPIRE

THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE IN THE ARABIC SOURCES

The Byzantine Empire, whose frontiers were contiguous with the Muslim frontiers was an ever-present military and ideological threat and it was thus inconceivable for the Muslim writers to ignore it. On the immediate plane, the knowledge of the Byzantine Empire meant a knowledge of the land, the routes leading to it, the passes, the landscape, the cities... The geographers of the ninth and tenth centuries give information about the frontiers of the Byzantine Empire and provide lists of itineraries leading to it and also lists of the themes that constitute the neighboring Empire.

Ibn Khurdadhbéh (d. 232/846) mentions the fortresses in Asia Minor, describes the location of Constantinople, and outlines the main routes leading to the Byzantine Empire.⁴²⁶ Al-Balkhī gives the following frontier: to the North and East there are the Turks, the Khazars, and the *Rūs* [Russians]; to the South is al-Shām, that is Syria, and Alexandria; to the West there is the Sea, Andalusia and the *thughur*. Al-Raqqa used to be part of their frontier during Sasanid times. Their capital was Antioch until the Muslims exiled them to the farthest points of their land.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁶ Ibn Khurdadhbéh, *Kitāb al-Masālik*, pp. 104-116.

⁴²⁷ al-Balkhī, *al-Bad' wa al-Tārīkh*, Vol. 4, p. 67.

The Arab geographers divided the Byzantine Empire into fourteen provinces. Mas'ūdī states that the Byzantine Empire is divided into fourteen *bunūd* and draws an analogy between the Byzantine themes and the Islamic system of 'ajnād.⁴²⁸ He lists nine provinces on the Asian side and five on the European side.⁴²⁹ Qudāma Ibn Ja'far also cites fourteen provinces, eleven on the Asian side and three on the European side.⁴³⁰ Similarly, Ibn Khurdadhbēh has three out of the fourteen provinces in the European side. Al-Balkhī says that the Byzantine land is formed of twenty-four provinces, 'amal. In each province there is an army, a governor and a *diwān*.⁴³¹

The Arab geographers provide us with five catalogues of the themes, the earliest of which is that of Ibn khurdadhbēh(845-8), the latest that of al-'Idrīsī(1154). The other three are those of Ibn al-Faqīh(circ. 902), of Qudāma(circ., 930) and the one contained in *Kitāb al-Tanbīh wal 'Ishrāf* of al-Mas'ūdī(956). The first four, all of which fall within our time-limit, closely resemble one another and are clearly derived from the same source. Al-Mas'ūdī must have had in addition, another authority.

⁴²⁸al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbīh*, p.179. In the Qur'ān, *Jund* is used to denote an armed troop or regular army. Following the Islamic conquests of Syria, it designated five military districts based on the Byzantine division into themes, each occupied by one legion. Cl. Huart, "Djund," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, first edition, p.1064 and D. Sourdel, "Djund," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, new edition, pp. 601-2.

⁴²⁹Ibid., pp.176-180.

⁴³⁰Qudāma Ibn Ja'far, *Kitāb al-Kharāj*, pp. 257-8.

⁴³¹al-Bad' wa al-Tārīkh, Vol. 4, p.67.

earliest list is cited by Ibn Khurdadhbēh from Muslim Ibn Abi Muslim al-Jarmī who was among the Muslim prisoners in the Byzantine Empire exchanged in 845: "He was a man who held a post on the frontier and was possessed of knowledge as to the people of the Rum and their country; and he wrote books about Rum and their kings and the men of rank among them, and their districts and the roads and ways through them, and the times of making raids into their country and invasions of it, and about their neighborhood to the territories of the Burgan and the Avars and the Burghur and the Saqāliba and the Kazars and others."⁴³² Mas'ūdī's list is arranged in a different order than the earlier lists and starts with the European themes rather than with the Asiatic ones. The themes he lists are identical with the themes known from Byzantine sources, except for Ṭablā which supposedly comprised Constantinople. His list, however, does not represent actual conditions in the Empire at the time of his writing the *Tanbīh* (345/956). In the tenth century there were in the Byzantine Empire no less than thirty military provinces.⁴³³ Mas'ūdī enumerates the crossing points from the Asian side to Constantinople, gives a description of the straits of the Hellespont, the Sea of Marmara and the Bosphorus, and of the ports on the Asiatic side.

The Arab authors, thus, mention Byzantine regions while

⁴³² al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbīh*, p. 190. See also E. W. Brooks, "Arabic Lists of the Byzantine Themes," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 21 (1901), pp. 67-77. See also W. Treadgold, "Remarks on the Works of al-Jarmī on Byzantium," *Byzatinoslavica* 44 (1983), pp. 205-212.

⁴³³ G. Ostrogorski, *History of the Byzantine State*, pp. 247-8.

listing the Byzantine military themes. However, even though the authors mention Thrace, Macedonia, Thessalonica and the Peloponesus, the the listings were essentially constituted of the Anatolic Themes. The geographer Ibn Hawqal provides three different maps of the Byzantine Empire in all of which the cartographic representation is of Anatolia. They have little of importance to say about Greece. Although this representation reflected a historical reality since the strength and orientation of the Byzantine Empire was by then concentrated in the East, by focusing on Anatolia, it, nevertheless, fundamentally reflected a blurred perception of the Byzantine Empire. Indeed, it is not the whole Empire that is represented in the Arabic sources, but only its Eastern part.⁴³⁴

CONSTANTINOPLE: ITS HISTORICAL AND SYMBOLIC IMPORTANCE

Except for these brief references, the Byzantine Empire is practically ignored. The countryside is not mentioned in the Arabic sources and there is an almost total absence of interest in the aesthetic value of the landscape. As for the Byzantine cities, except for Antioch-mentioned mostly in the context of Persian-Byzantine relations- and Trebizond, mentioned once or twice in reference to trade items and markets, no other cities, towns or geographical locations seem worthy of attention. It was only the capital of the Byzantine Empire and Eastern Anatolia that

⁴³⁴See A. Miquel, "Constantinople, ville sans visage." *Mélanges de l'Ecole Francaise de Rome, Moyen Age et Temps Modernes*, 96(1984)#1, pp. 398-403.

attracted the attention of Arab travellers and geographers. It is clear that Constantinople held a special place in the Arabs' perception of the Byzantine Empire to the exclusion of all other Byzantine cities, no matter how important they were. This explains the indifference of the Arabic sources to the capture and sacking of Thessalonika, the second most important city of the Byzantine Empire, by Leo of Tripoli in 904. This was one of the most important events in the history of the Arab-Byzantine wars. It is related in great detail in Greek by Ioannes Kamniates⁴³⁵ while Emperor Leo VI(886-912) devoted a work to it and Patriarch Nicholas I pronounced a homily on the theme of the capture of Thessalonika. However, very few Arab authors mention it. Mas'ūdī says in *Muruj al-Dhahab*: "I have heard accounts from many learned men, among whom some who were together with Leo, [ghulām Zarafa] during the expedition against Saluqiya [Thessalonika]."⁴³⁶ As for al-Tabarī, under the year 291, he mentions a letter transmitting news of victory against the Byzantines in Antakya[sic] and says: "it is said that this city competes with Constantinople."⁴³⁷ The very brief mention of this

⁴³⁵See A.P. Kazhdan "Some Questions Addressed to the Scholars who Believe in the Authenticity of Kameniates' Capture of Constantinople," in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 7 (1978) pp. 301-314, where he tried to prove that the work by Kameniates was composed in the fifteenth century on the eve of the capture of Thessalonika by the Ottoman Turks or immediately after the city was captured and sacked.

⁴³⁶al-Mas'ūdī, *Muruj* Vol. 2, p. 319.

⁴³⁷H. Gregoire corrects in "Le communiqué arabe sur la prise de Thessalonique," *Byzantion* 22(1952), pp. 373-378, the mistake that al-Tabarī made with respect to the name of the city in

important event contrasts with the detailed descriptions that the Arab provided in dealing with the expeditions against Constantinople. The information on the sack of the second city of the Byzantine Empire is more reminiscent of the listing of the yearly raids against *bilād al-rūm* that are found in the Muslim Chronicles. It seems as if anything short of a siege of Constantinople remained to the Arab authors a mere raid and thus deserving only cursory attention.

Constantinople attracted the attention of Arab geographers and travellers to the exclusion of the rest of the Byzantine Empire. The knowledge that the Arab authors have preserved of Constantinople is inaccurate and partly legendary. The tenth century geographer al-Maqdīsī himself observed that among Muslims controversy and fabrications about Constantinople abounded especially with respect to its size, buildings and conditions.⁴³⁸ The medieval authors are practically unanimous in declaring that no other place in the world can compare with it in size and in geographical position. According to Benjamin of Tudela, the huge trading city of Baghdad was the only place that could be compared with Constantinople.

Constantinople occupied a unique place in the Byzantine Empire. The foundation of Constantinople symbolized the beginning question.

⁴³⁸ Al-Maqdīsī, *Ahsan al-Taqāsim*, pp.147-148; By contrast, in the late twelfth century al-Harawī states that Constantinople is even greater than its reputation and prays God to make it part of the land of Islam. *Kitāb al-Ziyarāt, Guide des lieux de pelerinage*, ed. by Janine Sourdel Thomine (Damascus, 1956) p.128[56-57].

of the East Roman Christian Empire. Although the specific character of this Empire took centuries to develop, the Byzantine Empire starts with Constantine the Great's new religious policy and the founding of a new capital in Byzantium. It was the political and administrative center, an uncommonly large center of population, and the focus of the religious and economic life of the Empire, as well as the source of literature and arts. It was the Christian Orthodox city which was the heir of the Graeco-Roman civilization. Constantinople maintained its exceptional political, economic and cultural importance throughout the Middle Ages. In Byzantine sources the patterns of *topoi* for Constantinople's laudations included the city's close connection with imperial power, its coequality with Rome, its favorable geographical situation, its propitious climate, its sumptuous architecture, and its role as the center of arts and letters.⁴³⁹ The capital of the Byzantine Empire was designated at various times by the Byzantines as the New Jerusalem, the New Rome, the City of the Virgin and the Queen of Cities.⁴⁴⁰

The Arab authors called the capital of the Byzantines al-

⁴³⁹Igor Sevcenko, "Constantinople Viewed from the Eastern Provinces in the Middle Byzantine Period," *Essays Presented to Omeljan Pritsak*, *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* III/IV #2(1979), pp. 712-47.

⁴⁴⁰Helene Ahrweiler, *L'ideologie politique de l'Empire byzantin* (Paris, 1975), p.13; P.J. Alexander, "The Strength of Empire and Capital as Seen through Byzantine Eyes," *Speculum* 37(1962), pp. 340-357; Norman Baynes, "The Supernatural Defenders of Constantinople," in *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays*, (London, 1955) pp. 248-260.

Qustāntiniyya; they are nevertheless also aware of the site's old name, Byzantium. Al-Mas'ūdī discusses the name of the city and its meaning: "The Rum call it '*bolin*' and when they wish to express its greatness as the capital of the Empire they say '*estin bolin*.' The Rum do not call it al-Qustāntiniyya; only the Arabs do so."⁴⁴¹ The Byzantines, of course, called their capital Konstantinopolis. Many Byzantine authors, however, referred to it, as stated above, with expressions that betrayed their pride in their City.

Several Arab authors realized the historical importance of the transfer of the Roman capital from Rome to Constantinople. They also appreciated the watershed represented by both Christianization and the establishment of the Empire's capital in Byzantium and connected the two events with Constantine the Great. Mas'ūdī states that Constantine moved the capital from Rome and Nicomedia and built it on the gulf in the locality of Byzantium giving it his name.⁴⁴² Șā'id al-'Andalusī in his essay on the basic divisions between the nations states that "Rome was the capital of the Empire until 335[sic.] when Constantine son of Helena adopted the religion of Christ, rejected that of the Sabaeans and built on the Bosphorus a city bearing his name, Constantinople, a city situated at the center of the Greek world. This prince made this city his residence and it remains until today the capital of the Empire."⁴⁴³ Ibn Khurdadhbeh calls

⁴⁴¹al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbīh*, pp.138-139.

⁴⁴²al-Mas'ūdī, *Muřūj*, Vol. 2, p.41; Ibn Khurdadhbeh, *Kitāb al-Masālik*, p.104.

Constantinople "the greatest city of the Rum and their refuge."⁴⁴⁴

The Arab authors were aware of the prestige of Constantinople in the eyes of the Byzantines. 'Ubāda Ibn al-Šāmit, the ambassador of Caliph 'Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (13-23/634-4), was denied entrance to the City on his camel and was asked to enter, instead, on his mule. 'Ubāda, of course, refused the request and ended up entering on his camel, wearing his turban and carrying his sword.⁴⁴⁵ This, however, was an exceptional case and his entry in the way he did required a special permission from the Emperor himself: normally, the Arabic text implies, a foreigner, even an ambassador, was not allowed to enter 'the City of the King' except on a mule.

The symbolic value of the City is also mentioned by Ibn Khurdadhbeh who quotes a verse of Ibn Abi Ḥafṣa: "You have circumabulated Byzantine Constantinople resting your lance on its walls until they were covered with humiliation."⁴⁴⁶ Constantinople personified is not only the capital of the Rum; it stands for all of them. Another personification of Constantinople occurs in *Kitāb al-Buldān* where Ibn al-Faqīh says that Constantinople rejoiced in the destruction of Jerusalem and became so arrogant and proud that it came to be called the presumptuous: "Constantinople said: If the throne of my father is in the water, I was built on water. And so God promised her

⁴⁴³ Ṣā'īd al-'Andalusi, *Tabaqāt al-'Umām*, p.78.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibn Khurdadhbeh, *Kitāb al-Masālik*, p.109.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, p.141.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibn Khurdadhbeh, *Kitāb al-Masālik*, p.103.

suffering before the Last Judgement and said: By my power and majesty I will remove your jewels, your silk, your wine and your bread and will leave you with no song to sing. Your only inhabitants will be foxes and jackals. I will send you fire and leave you bald and between you and the sky there will be only emptiness. Your voice will reach the clouds in the sky for in your land other gods have been worshiped.⁴⁴⁷ This is an apocalyptic passage: the ruin of Constantinople will come before the Last Judgement at the hands of God, not at the hands of the Muslims. Such warnings are found especially in Traditions of the Prophet. Constantinople the wealthy and beautiful will be utterly destroyed and left desolate. The reason for this punishment is God's anger at the Byzantines because they are worshiping other gods.

Medieval authors, Arab, West European, and Russian showed exceptional interest in Constantinople, which was very different from their cities.⁴⁴⁸ For Westerners it had importance for its opulence and particularly for its abundance of relics. For the Arabs, its significance lay in its cultural and political prestige. This was especially so in the early days of the Muslim expansion and the consolidation of their state. The ambition of the first-century caliphs seems to have been directed towards the establishment of their power in Constantinople. The prestige of

⁴⁴⁷ Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, p. 146.

⁴⁴⁸ For an analysis of these descriptions see J.P.A. Van Der Vin *Travellers to Greece and Constantinople* (Istanbul, 1980) 2 vols. See Alain Ducellier, "Une mythologie urbaine: Constantinople vue d'Occident au Moyen Age," *Mélanges de l'Ecole Francaise à Rome; Moyen Age et Temps Modernes* 96 (1984)-1 pp. 405-424.

Constantinople made it the focus of the growing Muslim Empire and the target of several campaigns by the Muslim armies. With the solidification of the structure of the Islamic Empire, the whole policy of the Umayyads started shifting away from Byzantine tradition. However, it was not until the Muslims built their own capital in Baghdad that the desire to conquer Constantinople started to decrease. The transfer of the Capital to Iraq distanced the center of the Empire from the Byzantine frontiers and made the idea of the conquest of Constantinople a distant dream rather than a goal towards which forces and efforts were directed in a continuous and organized fashion.⁴⁴⁹ Once Baghdad became as important a city as Constantinople, the efforts of the Muslims to conquer the Byzantine capital ceased. This partially explains the various serious attempts to conquer Constantinople during the Umayyad period when the Muslim capital was still in Damascus and subsequent Muslim inertia following the arrival of the Abbasids and the founding of Baghdad.

THE ARAB SIEGES OF CONSTANTINOPLE

The Arab authors analyze extensively the various sieges of Constantinople: the causes for the sieges are expressed, the details

⁴⁴⁹ Such efforts came to a halt with Caliph Hishām (105–125/724–743). See Richard Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting* (Geneva, 1962), pp. 33–36, where he describes a fresco which is Persian in influence in Qasr al-Hair al-Gharbī built during the reign of Caliph Hishām. Ettinghausen thinks that Hisham deliberately broke away from the ambition of his predecessors to organize the Arab Empire as the heir of the Byzantine Empire. The artistic efforts of this period reveal the new orientation towards the East.

of the expeditions and of the actual sieges are described, and various anecdotes in connection with these sieges are related. Indeed, these sieges and assaults are celebrated in both history and legend and have even found their way into eschatological literature. It is peculiar that these same Arab authors do not mention the battle of Poitiers of 732, which in the historical tradition of the West, is the decisive battle that halted the Muslim advance and saved Western Europe for Christianity. The battle of Poitiers might not have been a major engagement and this would explain its absence from Arab annals. However, one finds in the Arab historical chronicles the Muslims' yearly expeditions, no matter how unimportant, against *bilād al-rūm*. Only a few Arab authors mention the battle of Poitiers, which they call *Balāt al-Shuhadā'* [the Highway of Martyrs] as a minor engagement. *Ṭabarī*, the major Arab historian, does not even mention the battle while *Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam* (803-871) who wrote the most important Arabic account of the conquest of North Africa and Spain, talks about expeditions against the Franks and of the martyrdom of ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-‘Akkī in 115/733-734.⁴⁵⁰ *Ibn al-Qutīyya*(d.977) who is the first major historian of Muslim Spain makes no mention of it either.⁴⁵¹ For the Arabs, the only expeditions worth mentioning were those set against Byzantium. The real enemy were the Byzantines who in addition to being

⁴⁵⁰*Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam*, *Futūh Misr wa Akhbaruha*, ed. C.Torrey (New Haven, 1922), pp. 216-217.

⁴⁵¹See Bernard Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery of Europe*(New York, 1982), p.19.

their cultural superiors were also the ones who were blocking the way to Europe. Whether the Arabs were actually aiming further beyond Constantinople remains to be proven. It was the failure of the Arab army to conquer Constantinople and not the defeat at Poitiers that halted the advance of the Arab armies into Europe.

The first naval expedition against Constantinople took place in 34/655 and ended in the battle of *Dhāt al-Sawārī*.⁴⁵² The next expedition was that of Yazīd and Abu Ayyūb al-’Ansārī in the year 48-49/668-669. *Kitāb al-Aghānī* mentions in connection with this expedition two tents in which the daughter of the King of Rum and the daughter of Jabala Ibn al-’Aiham, the Ghassanid amir, were waiting separately, each cheering and acclaiming the exploits of her group. This Ghassanid family of Jafna had fought with the Byzantines at the decisive battle of Yarmūk in 636 where the defeat of the Byzantines placed the whole of Syria and Palestine at the mercy of the Muslims. It is significant that the Arab Christian tribe allied with the Byzantines was perceived to be on the side of the Muslims, tribal and ethnic affiliation thus superseding religious allegiance. According to the story in *Kitāb al-’Aghānī*, Yazīd, wishing to please the daughter of Jabala, hit the gate of Constantinople with his club until it was split.⁴⁵³ An important legend is connected with this expedition. The legend

⁴⁵²al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Rusul wal-Mulūk*, I, 2865; al-Mas’ūdī, *Tanbīh*, p.217. Mas’ūdī mentions an earlier siege of Constantinople before the Arab conquests, that of the Persians during Emperor Phocas' reign, *Tanbīh*(Beirut, 1981), p.149.

⁴⁵³al-Isfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, Vol. 16, p. 33.

developed around the personality of Abu 'Ayyūb al-'Ansārī, one of the Companions of the Prophet, who had fought with the Prophet during the famous battle of Badr in the second year of the Hijra. Abu 'Ayyūb died during the expedition and was buried under the walls of Constantinople.⁴⁵⁴ The Byzantine Emperor said that the tomb of the Companion of the Prophet will be desecrated as soon as the Arab armies have left. However, following threats by the Caliph concerning the Christians living in Arab lands, the Emperor promised to respect the tomb of Abu 'Ayyūb. Later on, the Byzantine Emperor ornamented it, adding a monument with a cupola and many authors point that Abu 'Ayyūb's tomb became the object of veneration and pious visits on the part of the Byzantines who prayed there for rain during the dry seasons.⁴⁵⁵ In this legend, the Byzantine Emperor appears on the one hand disrespectful towards the dead and ignorant of Arab customs while on the other, he appreciates the importance of Abu 'Ayyūb, a Companion of the Prophet, to these Arabs. Much more peculiar is their attribution to the Byzantines of the rite of rainmaking, *i'stisqā*. Equally curious is that they make their enemies

⁴⁵⁴ Ibn Qutaiba, *Kitāb al-Ma'ārif*, ed. by Tharwat 'Akkasheh (Cairo, 1960), p. 140; al-Mas'ūdī, *Muṣūdī*, Vol. 5, p. 62. For this expedition and the prolonged siege of seven years see Andreas Stratos, "Le Siège ou Blocus de Constantinople sous Constantin IV," *Jahrbuch des Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 33 (1983), pp. 89-107.

⁴⁵⁵ *Al-Bad' wal Tārīkh*, Vol. 5, p. 117; Ibrāhīm al-'Adwī says that the tomb of Abu 'Ayyūb remained like a witness to the Muslims, always attracting their attention towards the capital of the Byzantines. See his *al-'Umawiyūn wal-Byzantīyyūn* (*The Omayyads and the Byzantines*) (Cairo, 1963), 2nd edition, p. 165.

venerate their hero.

Another expedition, essentially naval, took place between 674 and 680. The most famous expedition however, is that of Maslama son of 'Abd al-Malik in 715-717/97-99. Numerous accounts have been preserved of this expedition.⁴⁵⁶ The account in *Kitāb al-'Uyūn* which dates from the latter half of the eleventh century, is more complete than any of the other accounts.⁴⁵⁷ The story in *Kitāb al-'Uyūn* states that Maslama wrote to the Byzantine Emperor that "I will not leave this *jazīra*, peninsula, without entering your city." The Byzantine Emperor accepted to open the gates to him alone and ordered that "horses and men be lined up from the gate of the city to the gate of the Great Church, flags to be put up and palaces to be decorated in the best possible ornamentation." Maslama told al-Battāl: "I am entering this city knowing that it is the capital of Christianity and its glory; the only purpose for which I am entering the city is in order to uphold Islam and humiliate unbelief."⁴⁵⁸ Maslama paraded in the city and once he arrived at the gate of the palace, Emperor Leo (717-741) stood up and kissed his hand and walked by him to the Church while Maslama was riding on his horse.⁴⁵⁹ A mosque in

⁴⁵⁶The sources are late and contradictory and the oldest accounts especially the Arab ones are already more legend than history. See R. Guillard, "L'expédition de Maslama contre Constantinople, 717-718," *al-Mashriq* XL (Jan.-Feb.), pp. 89-112.

⁴⁵⁷*Kitāb al-'Uyūn*, ed. by De Goeje (Leiden, 1869) Vol. 1 pp. 23-33. The chief authorities of *Kitāb al-'Uyūn* are al-Wāqidī and al-Maidāni in the early part of the ninth century.

⁴⁵⁸Ibn al-'A am, *Kitāb al-Futūh* (Haydarabad, 1974), Vol. 7, p. 300. |

Constantinople is attached to Maslama's name: The Arab geographer al-Maqdisī, writing in 895, mentions that when Maslama entered Constantinople he imposed on the Byzantine Emperor the construction of a place facing his palace to shelter the important Muslim prisoners. This place must have had a mosque or a prayer hall.⁴⁶⁰ Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus (913-59) mentions that the mosque of the Saracens was built at the request of Maslama in the Praetorium.⁴⁶¹

Under the Abbasids only one expedition, under the command of Hārūn son of al-Mahdī (775-785) reached the Bosphorus. This was the last expedition against Constantinople.⁴⁶² It was under Hārūn al-Rashīd that the idea of conquering Constantinople dies out and this explains his effort to fortify the frontier.

⁴⁵⁹Ibid., p. 301.

⁴⁶⁰Marius Canard denies any connection between Maslama and the mosque in Constantinople and attributes it to the presence of a considerable number of Muslims in Constantinople: prisoners, exiles, merchants and travellers. In "Les expéditions des Arabes contre Constantinople dans l'histoire et la légende," *Journal Asiatique* 208-209 (1926), pp. 61-121

⁴⁶¹Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, ed. and trans. by Gy. Moravcsik and R.J.H. Jenkins (Washington, 1967) chapt 21. Abu al-Hasan al-Harawī (d. 1215) mentions in *Kitāb al-Ziyarāt* the great Mosque built by Maslama and the tomb of a descendant of Husain.

⁴⁶²Evliya Çelebi (d. 1058/1669), describing the siege of Constantinople by the Turks in 857/1453, questioned the success of the Turks: "Since Muhammad we have seen eleven sieges of Constantinople and if the Arabs failed to capture Constantinople will the Turks succeed?" H. Turkova, "Le siège de Constantinople d'après le Seyahatname d'Evliya Çelebi," *Byzantinoslavica* 14 (1953), pp. 1-13.

CONSTANTINOPLE IN ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS LITERATURE

Constantinople found a place in the Muslim religious literature in connection with these military expeditions that aimed at the conquest of the Byzantine Capital. According to a tradition found in the most authoritative corpus of Traditions, *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*, the Prophet said, "the first among my people who will conquer the city of the Caesar will have their sins forgiven."⁴⁶³

Numerous *hadīths* predict the conquest of Constantinople. The oldest *hadīths* referring to Constantinople could not have originated prior to the expeditions undertaken against the City. Those *hadīths* connecting the Last Hour with the fall of Constantinople developed only after the repeated failures of the Arab armies. *Hadīths* were 'remembered' once Constantinople became the target of the Muslim armies. The conquest of Constantinople came to represent a supreme if generally unattainable goal which could provide ultimate legitimization for a ruler or even a whole dynasty. The anonymous *Kitāb al-‘Uyūn* mentions that a group of learned men informed the Umayyad Caliph Sulaimān Ibn ‘Abd al-Malik (96-99/715-17) of a *hadīth* to the effect that a Caliph bearing the name of one of the prophets mentioned in the Qur’ān would conquer Constantinople. Caliph Sulaimān/Salomon thus dispatched his brother Maslama to capture the City.⁴⁶⁴ Another *hadīth* predicts the conquest of

⁴⁶³al-Bukhārī in *Les traditions islamiques* trans. by O. Houdas and W. Marcais, (Paris, 1903-1904) Vol. 2, p. 322.

⁴⁶⁴*Kitāb al-‘Uyūn*, p. 24.

Constantinople by a ruler of the Abbasid dynasty: "There would be more than thirty Abbasid caliphs; six among them will bear the same name, three others will bear another name and one of them will conquer Constantinople."⁴⁶⁵ The Arabs of al-'Andalus have their own promise from the third Orthodox Caliph, 'Uthmān Ibn 'Affān (23-35/644-656), who wrote to those in charge of the conquest of al-'Andalus: "Constantinople will be conquered from al-'Andalus; if you conquer al-'Andalus you will be partners of whoever conquers Constantinople."⁴⁶⁶ The conquest of Constantinople was the ultimate goal for the conquerors and the main enticement for their undertakings.

Whereas the Traditions quoted above state simply the future conquest of Constantinople, others defer its conquest to the end of time. Such predictions are part of Muslim apocalyptic literature.⁴⁶⁷ Some *hadiths* link the conquest of Constantinople

⁴⁶⁵ M. Canard, "Les expéditions des Arabes..."

⁴⁶⁶ Abu 'Ubaid al-Bakrī, *Jughrāfiyat al-'Andalus wa 'Urūba*, p.130.

⁴⁶⁷ Bernard McGinn in *Visions of the End*, states that "Apocalyptic fused together a variety of interests and was invoked for various purposes...Apocalyptic texts from various religious backgrounds and different ages display family resemblances in key areas that include: a sense of the unity and structure of history conceived as a divinely predetermined totality; pessimism about the present and conviction of its imminent crisis; belief in the proximate judgement of evil and triumph of the good." pp.3 and 10.

Louis Massignon, in "Textes prémonitoires et commentaires mystiques relatifs à la prise de Constantinople par les Turcs en 1453," *Oriens*, VI(1953), pp.10-17 defines apocalyptic texts in the following way: "On qualifie ordinairement d'apocalyptiques les textes où des événements inouïs sont "pressentis", annoncés; avec

to the Last Hour and the coming of the Muslim Antichrist, the *Dajjāl*: "The end of times will not come nor will the Last Judgement take place before the spread of Islam to the Rum whose great city Constantinople will be taken."⁴⁶⁸ The emergence of apocalyptic texts and their cumulation during certain times reflect usually periods of tribulations, of military defeats or of social and economic pressure. In an article on medieval apocalypses, P.J. Alexander call them "chronicles written in the future tense."⁴⁶⁹ The authors of the apocalypses thus express their reactions to contemporary events and their expectation for a brighter future. Do these traditions reflect the Muslim reaction to the repeated failures of the Muslim armies to conquer the City? Indeed one *hadīth* adopts a very consoling tone: "If the world has only one day to live, God will prolong it to allow a person from my family to bring under subjugation the *Jibal al-Dailam* and Constantinople."⁴⁷⁰

Some *hadīths* have as their source historical episodes in Arab-Byzantine relations. *Kanz al-‘Ummāl* cites a *hadīth* concerning three expeditions : one will be disastrous for the Muslims; the second one will be a joint expedition with the Rum against a

un contre-coup sur la psychologie des masses et sur les crises sociales qu'on ne saurait méconnaître."

⁴⁶⁸ Ibn Hanbal, *Musnād*, Vol. 2, p.174.

⁴⁶⁹ P.J. Alexander, "Medieval Apocalypses as Historical Sources," *American Historical Review* 73(1968)pp.997-1018; reprinted in *Religious and Political History and Thought in the Byzantine Empire*(Variorum Reprints, London, 1978)*30.

⁴⁷⁰ M. Canard, "Les expéditions des Arabes..."

common enemy beyond Constantinople during which a mosque will be built in Constantinople; the third expedition will achieve the conquest of Constantinople. Another *hadīth* mentions that the conquest of Constantinople will be preceded by a Rum attack against Dābiq and a fight against an army from Medina.⁴⁷¹ The *Imāmī* eschatological tradition signals that on the coming of the *Mahdī*, the Umayyads will seek refuge with the Byzantines and will even agree to embrace the Christian faith in order to save their skin.⁴⁷²

Thus, by the ninth century *fātiha Qistāntiniyya'*, the capture of Constantinople, became one of the four signs of the Last Hour.⁴⁷³ Clearly the Prophet could not have foretold the future expeditions against Constantinople and the ultimate conquest of the City by the Muslims. These traditions were put into Muhammad's mouth once Constantinople became the goal of the Muslims. This is not to say that there was a "deliberate forgery of tradition"⁴⁷⁴ or to uphold Schacht's contention that *hadīth* literature was partly

⁴⁷¹Muslim, *Sahīh*, Vol.4, #9, p.2221, *hadīth* #2897.

⁴⁷²E. Kohlberg "Some Imāmi Shi'i interpretations of Umayyad History," in *Studies of the First Century of Islamic Society*, pp.145-159, quoting 'Alī Ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qūmī, *Tafsīr*, ed.Tayyib al-Musawi al-Jazā'irī(Najaf, 1386) Vol. 2, p. 68(Qur'ān 21:68).

⁴⁷³The other signs are the ruin of Medina, the *malhama* and the struggle between the Antichrist and Jesus. According to Paul Casanova in *Mohamed et la fin du monde*(Paris, 1911), p.48, the Last Hour was originally associated with Medina, the goal of the first Muslims. It was only at a later stage, when the Arabs devoted all their energies to the capture of Constantinople that Traditions began to refer to Constantinople instead of Medina.

⁴⁷⁴Th. W. Juynboll, "Hadīth," *Encyclopedia of Islam*,1st Edition, pp.189-194.

fabricated by scholars of the second and third centuries who sought to justify their own views.⁴⁷⁵ Traditions were invented in so far as people expressed them in terms current in their days. As a reflection of their preoccupations, people tended to phrase traditions in terms relevant to the specific circumstances while relying on very distant memory. The resulting traditions seldom represented the actual utterances of the Prophet, but this process differs radically from calculated forgery by unscrupulous scholars. Being a reflection of the society's immediate fears, needs, and preoccupations, these traditions constitute a mirror of both events and mentalities.

By adopting an apocalyptic vision, the Muslims were giving way to a feeling of realism and pragmatism, having attempted to conquer Constantinople several times and failed. Expeditions against Constantinople were undertaken under the Umayyads but only one expedition reached the Bosphorus under Abassid rule and it was commanded by Hārūn, son of al-Mahdī. The Abbasids were thus justifying their inactivity: Constantinople cannot be captured until the end of times, so nothing can be done now.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁸³J. Schacht, *Origins of Muhammedan Jurisprudence*, 1950 p.138; for a criticism of Schacht's ideas and methods see M. Muṣṭafa al-Azmi, *On Schacht's Origins of Muhammedan Jurisprudence* (Riyadh, 1985).

⁴⁷⁶The Muslims were not alone in connecting the Last Hour with the fall of Constantinople. The Byzantines themselves believed that Constantinople personified the entire realm and its fall must mean the fall of the Byzantine Empire, the last World Empire, in order to give place to the eternal reign of Christ. See A.A. Vasiliev, "Medieval Ideas of the End of the World: East and West," *Byzantion*16 (1942) pp. 462-502

Although these Traditions have some historic reality behind them, they are couched in such terms that they verge far more towards the legendary. However, legend has a value in its own right, no less precious for understanding the past than the most ascertained facts and especially in the case of a study of perceptions and beliefs. Constantinople continued to attract the Muslims and later apocalypses mention the fall of Constantinople as a precondition to achieve peace in the land of Islam. *Saihat al-Būm fi Ḥawādīth al-Rūm*, attributed to Muhyī al-Dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī, states that the Mahdī will lead an army of ten thousand soldiers against Constantinople and will invite the King of Rum to Islam; the Mahdī will kill the Byzantine Emperor and the wealth of the City will be looted. Then they will hear that the Dajjāl has come.⁴⁷⁷

In the recensions of the martyrdom of al-Ḥallāj, the official one written by a *mutakallim* and the one written by an eyewitness clerk, it is mentioned that the flagellation of one thousand blows to which he was condemned was interpenetrated by two strange sentences al-Ḥallāj allegedly uttered. The first one occurred at the four hundredth blow: "At this very moment Constantinople is being captured," and at the six hundredth blow al-Ḥallāj told the Prefect: "I have an advice, *naṣīḥa*, which is worth the capture of Constantinople." To this the Prefect answered: "I have been warned by the vezir that you will make the Euphrates flow with gold in order to interrupt the

⁴⁷⁷ Armand Abel, "Un hadit sur la prise de Rome," *Arabica* 5 (1958), pp. 1-14.

flagellation." ⁴⁷⁸ These two distinct versions testify, again, that the desire to capture Constantinople had almost become a cliché that spoke to the spectators and was evoked in connection with the River of Gold, both events having become signs of the Last Hour. This is also testified in a poem by Abu Bakr al-Qaffāl which was written as an answer to a poem allegedly written by Emperor Nicephorus Phocas(963-9) in Arabic: "We hope with God's grace to conquer Constantinople, the sacred one."⁴⁷⁹

However, starting with the tenth century, Rome slowly emerged into the picture. Ibn al-Faqīh mentions a prediction that the Muslims will conquer a city called Rome situated further away from Constantinople that has 100,000 markets in each of which are 100,000 people. A later apocalypse of the fourteenth century substitutes Rome for Constantinople in the eschatological tradition: it is only after the conquest of Rome that the Mahdī will assault Constantinople, Medina, and Dailam. Thus it seems as if the old eschatological promise attached to the fall of Constantinople developed and adapted to the new circumstances

⁴⁷⁸Louis Massignon, "Le Mirage Byzantin..."

⁴⁷⁹Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, *Tabaqāt al-Shāfiyya al-Kubra*, p.183; The Arabic chivalric romances contain also some accounts of expeditions against Constantinople. The Romance of *Dhāt al-Himma*, for instance, echoes the great expedition led by Maslama. Here, however, the disaster is transformed into a triumph. The Chivalric romances are, unfortunately, outside the time framework of the thesis. For the romance of *Dhāt al-Himma* see Marius Canard,"Delhemma, épopee arabe des guerres arabo-byzantines," *Byzantion* 10(1935), pp. 283-300.

whereby Rome had become more important than Constantinople.⁴⁸⁰ The adoption of pseudo-revelations is thus more than a product of simple intentions, hopes and dreams which are expressed haphazardly.⁴⁸¹

At that point, Constantinople was the real challenge. The capital of the Byzantines was not only a wealthy city and a center of trade, it was also the center of culture and civilization. The period of Umayyad rule was that of the greatest and most intense Byzantine influence on the developing Islamic civilization. The history of Arabic numismatics demonstrates the continuity of Byzantine economic and administrative life and Byzantine influence on Arab political theory and practices.⁴⁸² The attacks on Constantinople support Gibb's thesis that the Umayyad caliphs were hoping to replace the Byzantine emperors,⁴⁸³ and thus, during the early Islamic era the conquest of Constantinople was a main goal.

It was only with the crystallization of Arabic as the language of government, the development of Islam as an articulate religious structure and the establishment of the Muslim capital in Bagdad

⁴⁸⁰ Armand Abel, "Un Hadit sur la Prise de Rome."

⁴⁸¹ See Armand Abel, "Changements politiques et littérature eschatologique dans le monde musulman," *Studia Islamica*, II, pp. 23-45.

⁴⁸² Speros Vryonis, *Byzantium and Islam, Seventh-Seventeenth Century*, "Byzantium, Its Internal History, and Relations with the Muslim World" (London, 1971).

⁴⁸³ H.A.R. Gibb, "Arab-Byzantine Relations under the Umayyad Caliphate," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, no. 12 (Cambridge, 1958), pp. 219-233.

that the attempts at conquering Constantinople were abandoned. The development of Arab culture and the displacement of Muslim Empire's center of gravity further East, away from Byzantium to a Sassanid milieu, lessened Byzantine influence and hence the importance of Byzantium as a cultural model decreased. Constantinople ceased to be representative of a distinctly superior culture and now the two capitals Bagdad, and Constantinople, vied with each other in magnificence, artistic splendor and cultural refinement. Caliph al-Ma'mūn(198-218/813-33) asked Emperor Theophilus(829-42) to send Leo the Philosopher to Baghdad while, according to an Arabic source, the Byzantine Emperor asked Hārūn al-Rashīd to send him the Arab poet Abu al-'Atāhiyya. Palaces were built in mutual imitation of both architecture and decoration. Constantinople, could not be totally ignored, but its capture was, however, postponed to a remote future. Thus it was that the conquest of Constantinople passed from the domain of politics and propaganda to that of legend and eschatology.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTIONS OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Most of the descriptions of Constantinople found in the Arabic texts were done by hearsay. A main authority is Muslim al-Jarmī who was captured by the Byzantines and later ransomed in 845.⁴⁸⁴ The physical descriptions of Constantinople are scanty and often include the geographical location of the city, the

⁴⁸⁴al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbīh*, pp.190-191; Mas'ūdī is the only known source on al-Jarmī's life and work. See Ahmad Shboul, *al-Masudi and His World* (London, 1979), p. 234.

surrounding walls, and the gates.

The Arab geographers locate the City geographically, giving its boundaries: Constantinople is part of the continent that extends to Rome and the land of the Franks; to the east it is connected to the land of the Turks.⁴⁸⁵ It is surrounded by a canal from both the East and North; On the southern and western sides it touches the land and on this continental side there are numerous gates: some say that it has one hundred large and small gates.⁴⁸⁶ Ibn al-'A'tham al-Kūfī discloses that there is only one road leading to Constantinople which is located in the middle of a peninsula, *jazīra*; the rest of the *jazīra* is constituted of their farms and cattle.⁴⁸⁷

Mas'ūdī places Constantinople in the province of *Tablā*. He states that when Constantine founded it he expanded its fortifications and its buildings. Thus on the western side it is surrounded by a wall that stretches from the Syrian Sea to the sea of the Khazars. The wall is called *makron tichos*, the long wall; and indeed, its length extends to a four-day march. Most of the land between Constantinople and this wall consisted of the domain of the Emperor and the patricians and constituted also pastures for animals. The area around the city was cultivated.⁴⁸⁸ Mas'ūdī appreciates the strategic location of the site and explains that Emperor Constantine had to trick the King of Burgan in order

⁴⁸⁵ al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbīh*, p.139.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibn khurdadhbēh, *Kitāb al-Masālik*, pp.104-105.

⁴⁸⁷ *Kitāb al-Futūh*(Haydarabad, 1974), Vol.7, pp.194-5.

⁴⁸⁸ al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbīh*, p.179 and *Murūj*, Vol. 2, p.41.

to get from him the permission to built it there.⁴⁸⁹ Maslama described Constantinople and its buildings to 'Umar Ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz(99-101/717-720): "Its buildings are of stone and pebbles except for the Great Church and the Palace of Emperor Leo which are made of white marble. It has seven different walls with various gates."⁴⁹⁰

The most extensive and informative description of the capital of the Byzantines by an Arab was made in the early tenth century by Hārūn Ibn Yahya. Although captive, Hārūn was left to wander in Constantinople contemplating buildings, monuments and churches, describing the Imperial Palace and some of its halls, analyzing with interest the talismans, and witnessing or even taking part in some imperial ceremonies. In spite of the proposed hypothesis that Hārūn may have been a Christian,⁴⁹¹ his description of the splendors of the Byzantine Capital was accepted as genuine by the Muslims and was thus inserted in a Muslim geographical work and quoted by other Arabic authors.⁴⁹²

⁴⁸⁹al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbīh* , p.142.

⁴⁹⁰Ibn al-'A'tham, *Kitāb al-Futūh*, Vol.7, pp. 309-310.

⁴⁹¹Marquart points as a proof to Harun's Christianity the absence in his description of the mosque in Constantinople. *Osteuropäische und Ostasiatische Streitzüge*(Leipzig, 1903), p.207. This mosque, however, might have been simply a prayer hall and not any significant building worthy of the Muslims. Seeing the splendours of the palaces and churches in Constantinople, Hārūn would not mention a modest prayer hall. Furthermore, Hārūn singled out the Muslim captives and the prisons for Muslims several times: why bother if he was not a Muslim himself?

⁴⁹²In *Travellers to Greece and Constantinople*(Istanbul,1980), Vol.1, p.121, J.P.A. Van Der Vin states that the account of Hārūn is an exceptional one and that no

The description of Hārūn Ibn Yahya is inserted in the geographical work of Ibn Rustih's *Kitāb al-'A'lāq al-Nafīsa*.⁴⁹³ The date of the arrival of Hārūn to Constantinople is uncertain. J. Markwart and A. A. Vasiliev believe that Hārūn was in Constantinople in the last quarter of the ninth century during the reign of Basil I (867-886). G. Ostrogorski, however, places his arrival in the winter of 912-913, during the brief reign of Emperor Alexander (912-913).⁴⁹⁴

From Harūn's detailed description, Constantinople seems to be a city with very strong walls, and with many utilitarian buildings such as aqueducts, churches, and a Palace. The Arab geographers concentrated their attention on the description of the military side of the City, namely, its walls, gates, and defenses, while with

Western description of the tenth century can compare with it especially with regard to his concern for all sorts of non-religious aspects of the life in the Byzantine capital.

⁴⁹³Ibn Rusteh, *Kitāb al-'A'lāq al-Nafīsa*, pp. 119-130; French translation by Gaston Wiet, *Les atours précieux* (Cairo, 1955) pp. 135-145. Physical descriptions of Constantinople are included in the thirteenth century work of Zakariyya al-Qazwīnī, 'Athār al-Bilād wa 'Akhbār al-'Ibād, ed. F. Wustenfeld (Gottingen, 1848), pp. 406-408 and in the above mentioned *Kitāb al-Ziyarāt* of al-Harawī who died in 1215. Ibn Battūta, the fourteenth century traveller, visited also Constantinople and left descriptions of Constantinople, the emperor's palace, the Great Church, the monastery. See *Rihlat Ibn Battūta* (Beirut, 1964), pp. 344-358.

⁴⁹⁴J. Marquart, *Osteuropäische und Ostasiatische Streifzuge*, p. 211; A. A. Vasiliev, "Harun ibn Yahya and the description of Constantinople," *Seminarium Kondakovianum* 5 (1932) pp. 149-163; G. Ostrogorski, "Zum Reisebericht des Harun ibn Yahya," *Seminarium Kondakovianum* 5 (1932), p. 254.

Harun we also see beautiful markets, wonderful fountains, and numerous statues and talismans.

Hārūn starts his description of Constantinople by mentioning its size which he approximates to 12 square parasangs, each parasang equalling a mile and a half.⁴⁹⁵ The sea surrounds it from the East; from the West it borders the desert which leads to Rome. It has a fortress and the gate from which one goes to Rome is made of gold and is thus called the Golden Gate. It is decorated with five statues in the form of elephants and one statue in the form of a man who holds the reins of an elephant.⁴⁹⁶ This Gate was indeed a most important one as it was the official entrance of the emperors at their return from their military expeditions.⁴⁹⁷ Other Arab travellers have described this Gate. According to Ibn Khurdadhbeh, this Gate was used for the passage of the armies on their way to war.⁴⁹⁸ Mas'ūdī mentions a golden gate with bronze slabs⁴⁹⁹ and the later geographer, 'Idrīsī, talks about enormous iron slabs gilded with golden leaves.⁵⁰⁰ Another gate which Hārūn mentions is the Iron Gate called the Gate of Pigas through which the Emperor goes for promenades. This gate led to the church and monastery of Our Lady of the Source, and starting with Basil I, the emperors had a country mansion

⁴⁹⁵ This estimation is less by half than the usual estimation of the area of the City.

⁴⁹⁶ *Kitāb al-'A'lāq al-Nafīsa*, pp.119-130.

⁴⁹⁷ R.Janin, *Constantinople Byzantine* (Paris,1964), pp. 269-273.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibn Khurdadhbeh, *Kitāb al-Masālik*, p.105.

⁴⁹⁹ al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, Vol. 2, p. 261.

⁵⁰⁰ 'Idrīsī, *Nuzhat al-Muṣṭaq fi 'Ikhtirāq al-'Afāq*, trans. by A.Jaubert, *La Geographie d'Edrisi* (Paris,1840), Vol.2, p. 293.

there. 501

Harūn also describes a hippodrome which is near the Imperial palace: it resembles a *maidān* and is a meeting-place for the patricians who can be observed by the emperor from his Palace. On the Western side of the Golden Gate there are two doors through which eight horses and two golden chariots are led. 502 The Great Palace in Constantinople included the most important monuments of the capital. It covered a surface area of 100,000 square meters and formed a complex of buildings, courtyards, galerias, and gardens. 503 Hārūn gives the following description of the Palace: "The Palace of the king is surrounded on all its sides by a wall of one parasang in perimeter. One of the western sides connects to the sea. It has three iron gates: one is called the Gate of the Hippodrome, the second is that of Mankana, and the third is the Sea Gate."

Mas'ūdī mentions in his *Murāj* a palace in the western side

501 R.Janin, *Constantinople Byzantine*, pp.275-276 and R.Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'Empire byzantin. I: Le siège de Constantinople et le patriarchat oecumenique. 3:Les églises et les monastères* (Paris, 1969), pp. 223-228.

502 This description of the Hippodrome is confusing and it is not clear whether what is being described is the Hippodrome or the small, covered and private Hippodromion of the Palace mentioned in the *Book of ceremonies: De Ceremoniis*, Bonn, I, 37; Albert Vogt, *Le livre des Ceremonies, Commentaire I* p.120. c.f. also R. Janin, *Constantinople Byzantine* , pp.119-120.

503 R. Janin, *Constantinople Byzantine*, p.107. The Palace was a city within a city having its own walls, gates, harbors, official halls, baths, libraries and sanctuaries. See G.Dagron, "Constantinople," *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*(New York,1983), Vol.3, pp .549-557.

of the City and another on the side of the canal.⁵⁰⁴ In his other work, *al-Tanbih wal 'Ishrāf*, *Mas'ūdī* mentions yet a third palace built by Empress Irene.⁵⁰⁵ As for the Gate of the Hippodrome, although the name as such does not appear in the Book of Ceremonies, the Palace did have several entries on the side of the Hippodrome.⁵⁰⁶

Entering through the Hippodrome Gate, *Hārūn* found a large vestibule, 100 x 50 feet; on each side were elevated seats, with brocade covers, quilts, and pillows, on which black Christians were sitting, holding in their hands golden shields and lances. The Gate of Mankana led to an even larger hall 200x 50 feet. This hall was paved with marble and there were Khazars who were also seated, holding bows in their hands. The Sea Gate was 300x50 feet and was paved with red bricks; in the covered seats, Turks were sitting holding bows and shields. At the end of the vestibule there was a courtyard beyond which a curtain was hanging on the gate which led to the Palace. It was Palace section of the Gate of Mankana that *Hārūn* found the prisons: There were four prisons in this vestibule; one for the Muslims, another for the people of Tarsus, the third for the general population and the fourth for the chief of Police.

The geographer *Ibn Hawqal*, writing fifty years after *Hārūn*, mentioned also four prisons, other than the one in *Dar al-Balāt*

⁵⁰⁴*al-Mas'ūdī*, *Murūj*, p. 45.

⁵⁰⁵*al-Mas'ūdī*, *Tanbih*, p. 167.

⁵⁰⁶Albert Vogt, *Le livre des Ceremonies, Commentaire I*, pp.26 and 120.

[the Pretorium]: these prisons were those of the Thracians and of the Opsikion, where the prisoners were not chained, and the prisons of Bukellarion and Numera, which were much more rigorous.⁵⁰⁷ Both Ibn Hawqal and Hārūn were mistaken in calling these buildings prisons for they served as barracks for the various detachments of soldiers cantonned in the Palace.⁵⁰⁸ Al-Maqdisī says that the prison where the Muslims were incarcerated was built at the request of Maslama Ibn ‘Abd al-Malik, the Umayyad prince who besieged Constantinople in 98-8/716-7, and was separated from the Palace of the Emperor by a vast space.⁵⁰⁹ This description of al-Maqdisī corresponds to the descriptions of the Pretorium.

Entering the Sea gate, on the left, Hārūn saw the emperors' church: it had four golden doors and six silver doors. In the Loge reserved for the emperor, there was a seat inlaid with pearls and rubies; at the door which led to the altar, stood four marble columns. The altar was made of wood and was encrusted with pearls and rubies. The whole ceiling was made of gold and silver. The church had four 200x100 courtyards. In the Eastern courtyard, there was a marble carved basin which Hārūn describes in detail as well as twelve columns on which were depicted a falcon, a sheep, a Taurus, a cock, a lion, a lioness, a wolf, a partridge, a peacock, a mare, an elephant and an

⁵⁰⁷ Ibn Hawqal, *Kitāb Sūrat al-’Ard*, p.195;

⁵⁰⁸ M. Izzedine, "Un Prisonnier Arabe à Byzance au IXème Siècle: Haroun ibn Yahya," *Revue des Etudes Islamiques* (1941-1946) pp.41-66, note 1, pp.49-50.

⁵⁰⁹ al-Maqdisī, *’Ahsan al-Taqāsim*, pp.147-148.

angel.⁵¹⁰ Hārūn mentioned a cistern from which water was drawn to the statues standing at the top of the columns: during feasts the cistern was filled with the amount of 10,000 jars of wine and one thousand jars of white honey. On his way out from the Palace to the Church, the Emperor could see these statues and the liquid that poured from their mouths and ears into the basin, and all those accompanying him would drink from it. In the Palace there was a large courtyard of 400 feet, paved with green marble, and decorated with mosaics and frescoes. The treasury was on the right side where a statue of a horse stood and a horseman whose eyes consisted of rubies. On the left side there was a *majlis* in which there was a wooden table, an ivory table, and a golden table. Four golden plateaus brought to the Emperor on chariots were said to have belonged to Salomon, David, Qārūn, and Constantine the Great, respectively. All of them were decorated with pearls and rubies. Each of the beds could hold twelve guests and the table of the emperor and his plates and vessels were all made of gold.⁵¹¹

To the west of the Church, ten feet away, there was a column, built of different columns, surrounded with silver chains. At the

510 There are disputes concerning what church is being referred to. c.f. R.Jenkins and C.Mango, "The Date and Significance of the Tenth Homily of Photius," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 1956, pp.125-140 and Paul Magdalino, "Observations on the Nea Ekklesia of Basil I," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 37(1987) pp.51-64.

511 R. Janin thinks that Hārūn is referring to the 'Triclinos of the Nineteen Beds' which was a large hall of great magnificence for receptions, *Constantinople byzantine*, p.112.

top of the column there was a squared marble table on which there was a marble coffin for Justinian, the founder of the Church. On the coffin there was a bronze statue of Justinian sitting on a horse. There was a golden crown ornamented with pearls and rubies on the head of the statue which had, apparently, belonged to Justinian himself. His right hand stood as if he were saluting/calling the people of Constantinople.⁵¹² Hārūn was, of course, referring to the famous Column of Justinian which the Byzantines called Augsteon. Procopius has described it: the figure of the horseman was turned towards the East and was holding up its hand in that direction. In his other hand the rider held a golden globe or an apple with a cross on top of it. The orb in the emperor's hand indicated that all lands and seas were under his command. The right hand, extended towards the sun, meant, according to Procopius, that foreign peoples in the East were commanded to stay in their territory. The statue was the symbol of the power of this Christian emperor and a commemoration of the triumphs scored against the Persians. In Hārūn's account this original meaning is hardly found: Hārūn saw in the gestures of the hand an invitation to people to come to Constantinople. The position facing the East pointed in the direction of Islam.⁵¹³

⁵¹²Kitāb al-“A’lāq al-Nafīsa, pp.119-130.

⁵¹³al-Harawī (d. in Aleppo in 1215) mentions the Augsteon but mistakes the statue for that of Constantine. He gives the following description: Constantine[sic] is seated on a horse whose hoofs are soldered to the stony block except for the right hoof which is lifted as if the horse was moving. The right hand of

Harūn and the Spanish geographer Abu 'Ubaid al-Bakrī described in some detail the organ in Constantinople. Harūn had it in the Palace whereas Abu 'Ubayd had the organ in the Emperor's church.⁵¹⁴ Harūn described also the Horlogion which was in a building south-west of St. Sophia. The clock which, according to Harūn, was made by Bolonius, had twenty-four small doors each opening and closing by itself with the passing of each hour. Bolonius is the philosopher Apollonius (1st cent. A.D.) whom the Byzantines considered to be the sculptor of most of the statues and stelae representing animals in public places at Constantinople, and to which they attributed magical power. Harūn mentioned⁵¹⁵ bronze horses which are talismans built by the wise Apollonius to prevent the horses from agitating and neighing. These horses are most probably the same ones which were transported to Venice during the Latin occupation of Constantinople in the thirteenth century and were placed on the facade of the Church of St. Mark.

Constantine[sic], raised and open, points in the direction of the land of Islam while in his left hand he is holding a globe. This column is visible to navigators from a one-day distance and is the object of different stories. Some say that in the hand of the statue there is a talisman which prevents the enemy from striking the City; others say that on the globe the following is written: "I have so well possessed this world that it was in my hand the way this globe is in my hand; now I have left this world and have carried nothing with me." al-Harawī, *Guide des lieux de pelerinage*, p.114; See also Janin, *Constantinople Byzantine*, pp.77-80.

⁵¹⁴Abu 'Ubaid al-Bakrī, *Jughrāfiyat al-'Andalus*, pp.194-195.

⁵¹⁵P.J. Alexander, "Medieval Apocalypses as Historical Sources," *American Historical Review* 73(1968)pp. 997-1018; reprinted in *Religious and Political History and Thought in the Byzantine Empire*(Variorum Reprints, London, 1978)#30.

Likewise, the four copper snakes are talismans which render snakes inoffensive. 516

Close to the Golden Gate, there was an arch in the middle of the *sūq*, the forum, in which there were two statues, one pointing in a way signifying 'come here' and the other in the sense of 'wait a moment'. These were talismans to which the captives were brought and depending on whether they stay put or move, they were either taken to prison or killed. 517

Hārūn mentioned an aqueduct in Constantinople to which water was carried from the land of the Bulgar. Once inside the city the river branches in three directions :to the palace, to the prisons of the Muslims, and to the baths of the patricians. The rest of the population of the City drinks water which is barely potable.

In his description of the city, the monuments that Harūn did or did not mention are significant of a difference in emphasis.

Hārūn did not mention Hagia Sophia which was the main church and the seat of the Patriarch. He did not mention relics either. It may be the difference of religion which led to this indifferent

516 "This monument, formed in reality of three snakes, was according to Janin one of the most beautiful monuments in the hippodrome. R. Janin, *Constantinople Byzantine*, p.191 Jean Ebersolt says in *Constantinople byzantine et les voyageurs du Levant* (Paris, 1919) that it was for Hārūn as for all people in the middle ages a talisman and did not evoke the memory of ancient Greece.

517 Hārūn is referring to the Modius in the Forum Amastrianum where executions took place and the modius was a reminder of the punishment inflicted on the merchants who cheated in selling wheat. R.Janin, *Constantinople byzantine*, pp.68-69.

approach. However, the omission may also point to the Muslims' profound fears of their Byzantine rivals having the possibility to offer a cultural and religious alternative. However, his description of the wealth and beauty of the Emperor's Palace, ceremonial, and some non-religious buildings and monuments, signals what captured the admiration and appreciation of the Muslims: the wealth and splendor of the great City.

Harūn mentioned the three axes around which the life of the City gravitated: St. Sophia, the Palace and the Hippodrome. The great absents, however, are the people of Constantinople, its streets, and its crafts. The daily aspect of the city is nowhere to be found. Harūn could not, of course, capture the city in its entirety, for as in any other city, there is more than the eye can see, more than the ear can hear. His perception of the city is partial, fragmentary and mixed with other concerns. As an observer and having his own purposes, Harūn selected, organized and endowed with meaning what he saw.

Like every medieval city, Constantinople had its filthy side streets filled with a rabble. Constantinople was the center of commerce of the early middle ages. The bulk of the city was occupied by the houses and the shops of the trading community.

In addition, there was Byzantine manufacturers of arts and luxuries such as silk brocades or work in enamel on metal.⁵¹⁸ Among all Arab authors, Al-Maqdīsī is alone in mentioning the markets: "they are beautiful, the prices are low and the fruits

⁵¹⁸S. Runciman, *The Emperor Romanus Lecapenus and His reign*, pp. 21-2.

numerous.⁵¹⁹ The beauty and wealth of Constantinople are admired but its people are ignored. A marginal reference to the streets of Constantinople is found in *Kitāb al-'Aghānī* which tells the story of the poet al-Salt al-Wābīrī who, having been punished for drinking wine, left to Byzantine territory, converted to Christianity and married. He is the hero in an anecdote where he is found wavering between his desire to go back home and his love for his new family. A Muslim ambassador came to Constantinople and while he was going through the streets of the city on a mule, he heard a sad voice reciting in Arabic a verse concerning a locality close to Madina. Moved by the beauty of the voice and, at the same time, intrigued, the ambassador found that the voice was coming from a room of a house.⁵²⁰ This is a rare reference to streets and houses in Constantinople. In the Arabic descriptions, the City seems empty of its inhabitants while everything that is mentioned seems to remind of the Imperial presence: walls, churches, palace, aqueducts...

The words which are most frequently mentioned in the description of Hārūn are: gold, rubies and pearls. The wealth of the city astonished him and he could not help but focus on this aspect. Indeed, from the very beginning, gold was linked with the Byzantines and Emperor Heraclius was referred to, sometimes, as the minter of the golden dinar, the nomisma. The marvels of the city that the Arab authors mention, make for a fragmentary knowledge of the city and render their description more

⁵¹⁹ Al-Maqdīsī, 'Ahsan al-Taqāṣīm, p.148.

⁵²⁰ al-İṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, Vol.5, 175

legendary than real. And indeed, the Byzantine capital played an unconscious mythical role whose function was to stand up as a reflective mirror of the power and prestige of the Caliphate.⁵²¹

Thus we end up with a vague image of Constantinople. In spite of the detailed descriptions of certain monuments, we are left more with an idea of the city than with a real city.

Constantinople, wealthy and powerful, made a strong impact on Hārūn, the Arab prisoner. One peculiarity in his description is the absence of frank comparisons with other Muslim cities, especially Baghdad, although Hārūn pointed to certain aspects of Constantinople which were absent from Baghdad. In al-Baghdādī's description of Baghdad, it is reported that Abu 'Uthmān al-Jāhīz said: "I have seen the great cities which are greatly reputed for their architecture and fortification in the Syrian provinces and *bilād al-rūm* and other countries; I have never seen a city which is higher in elevation and more perfectly round, having wider gates or more remarkable than al-Zawrā', which is the city of Abu Ja'far al-Mansūr."⁵²² In the same work of Al-Baghdādī, it is said that al-Mansūr (136-158/754-75) in laying out the town of al-Karkh, the great commercial suburb, which was not included in his original plan was inspired by the advice of an envoy of emperor Constantine V (741-75). Several anecdotes make it manifest that Constantinople was the model city for some Muslims and that the opinion of the Byzantines was

⁵²¹See A. Miquel, "Constantinople, ville sans visage,"

⁵²² al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī, *L'introduction Topographique à l'Histoire de Baghdad*, p.16

decisive in the construction and planning of Baghdad: Al-Baghdādī states that when al-Mansūr completed *Madinat al-Salām*, Baghdad, having placed the "aṣwaq" in its arcades on all sides, a Byzantine ambassador was taken for a walk in the city and al-Mansūr asked for his opinion. The Byzantine ambassador said: "It is perfect, 'amruha kāmil, except for one thing...your enemy can traverse it at any time and your secrets can be disseminated in the provinces...the markets, 'aswāq, are in the City and they are open to everybody; the enemy can enter under the pretext of making commerce; and as for the merchants, they go to the provinces disclosing your secrets." It is then that al-Mansūr ordered then to move the markets to al-Karkh. 523

Another anecdote relates more extensively the influence of advice of the Byzantine envoy on the planning of the capital of the Muslim Caliphate:

"While al-Mansūr was receiving an ambassador from the Byzantine Emperor, he heard great shouting which almost shook the palace and when enquiring he was told: "Prince of the Faithful, it is a cow which was approached to be slaughtered but overpowered the butcher and started wandering about in the markets, 'aswāq." The Byzantine ambassador told al-Mansūr: "Prince of the Faithful, you have constructed a city the like of

523 Ibid., p. 21. Al-Sayyad explains the move by saying: "The increasing number of the population, the rise in their power and standard of living and the great demand for laborers and craftsmen brought about the need to transfer markets outside the circular city." See Nezar al-Sayyad, *Cities and Caliphs: On the Genesis of Arab-Muslim Urbanism* (New York, 1991), p.128.

which no one before had ever built but it has three defects: its remoteness from water...the absence of gardens and the third defect is that your subjects remain with you and when the subjects are with their king, his secret are disclosed." Al-Mansūr answered: "As far as your statement about water, we have calculated what is enough to moisten our lips; as for the second defect, we have not been created for amusement and play; as for secrecy, I keep no secrets from my subjects." Later, however, the Caliph recognized what was founded in these observations and ordered that two canals be extended from the Tigris to the Palace, the 'Abāssiyya to be planted, and to move the population to al-Karkh.⁵²⁴

A new capital is not merely the choice of a city. Baghdad carried with it the prestige and authority of the Abbasid Caliphate as well as symbolizing its new universal orientation.⁵²⁵ These stories, found in al-Baghdādī, should perhaps not be given credence, but they indicate that the Muslims were receptive to Byzantine influences on such important matters as they pertain to the Caliphate's capital. That the Muslims are said to have implemented the advice of the Byzantine envoy on such a matter is a testimony as to the reliance of the Muslims on Byzantine city-planning and their belief in their rival's superiority on such matters and on their complete fascination with Constantinople.

⁵²⁴al-Baghdādī, *Ibid.*, pp.18-19.

⁵²⁵See the introduction in Jacob Lassner, *The Topography of Baghdad in the Early Middle Ages*(Detroit, 1970).

The most surprising characteristic of Hārūn's description, however, is its lack of negative comments and criticism. Hārūn's impartiality, extraordinary at first sight, is, however, the natural reflection of the level of confidence that the Arabs had attained in their civilization. This description lacks undertones urging for imitation and at the same time does not serve as a contrast for what correct behavior should be. There was no need now to do that since Baghdad was firmly established, a Baghdad that was very equal to Constantinople.

CONCLUSION

Islam and Byzantium. Two people, two civilizations in confrontation. Both scared, each unable to understand the other and in fear, they necessarily flee forward: a war is thus started, a war of two causes, a perpetual war, then. Two Empires in a permanent state of war and yet the conflict is accompanied by admiration, borrowings, and at times even identification, an identification that can only occur between equals.

The Arab authors write with a certain image in their mind. The image is to some extent, the motive force pushing to decide what they will see when they look at the Byzantines. At the same time, the knowledge of the Byzantine Empire was not a marginal matter reserved only to the pleasure of isolated scholars. It was a knowledge that was vital for the politico-military interests of the Caliphate and also the interests of commerce and daily life. And indeed, Muslim reports are never completely dissociated from a reference to the Muslim world, either explicit or implicit.⁵²⁶ The resulting image is not a typically stereotypical one for it is not all static. The Muslims were themselves aware of the continuous changes that befall any

⁵²⁶see A. Miquel, "L'Inde et la Chine..."

society. Al-Tawhīdī, having dealt with this subject at length, concluded: "with each century people acquire new habits and a mentality which they did not possess before."⁵²⁷

At the beginning, the Byzantines were not the only enemy: there were others, both Arabs and Persians. Byzantium was then perceived with more indulgence. Later, the Byzantines were the only main threat left and hostility was launched full scale. And indeed we can trace this development in the Arabic works which alternate the favorable judgements and the harsh criticism. Contempt and hatred went increasing and this can be explained historically. In Qur'anic times, the Prophet's position, reflected in *ṣūrat al-Rūm*, pointed to a positive view of the Byzantines as friends and allies. In the early times of Umayyad history, having defeated the Persian Empire and subdued the rebelling tribes, the main concern of the Umayyad rulers became Byzantium. The prestige of the Byzantine state was great and thus are explained the repeated military efforts to conquer Constantinople. Byzantium offered a model state which the Muslims set out readily to imitate. The administrative and political patterns chosen by the Umayyads were the Byzantine patterns. At this early time, the Byzantines were still clearly superior, a superiority expressed in the Arabic texts by reflecting the Byzantine self-view: the Byzantine commander told Khālid Ibn al-Walid when the latter invited him to embrace Islam: "this can never happen. You are far from seeing the "sons of asfar" leaving the religion of their ancestors to join another religion. As

⁵²⁷ Al-Tawhīdī, *al-Imtā' wal Mu'ānasa*, part 3, p.3.

for paying the *jiziya*, all the soldiers that you see, will die rather than pay it; and how can they pay it when they are the ones who collect it?"⁵²⁸

With time, the Islamic Caliphate and the Byzantine Empire survived as acknowledged equals. The Byzantines came eventually to regard the Muslim caliphs as virtually the equal of their emperors. For instance, in his letter to the Caliph, Nicholas Mysticus, the regent of the Byzantine Empire, wrote that two lordships rule the world, The Roman-Christian and the Islamic.⁵²⁹ A modus-vivendi was established and although there was a lack of real knowledge and understanding of the Other on both sides, there was a mutual admiration, and even an acknowledgment of sharing the world between them. However, at the same time, behind this acknowledgment, ran a deep vein of enmity and contempt. It is this duality, with its mixture of fascination and suspicion, which characterizes the image of the Byzantines. Arrogance and self-deception did not preclude interest and fascination with the enemy.

One finds similarities which are the consequences of reciprocal influences.⁵³⁰ The enmity between them did not isolate the Arabs and the Byzantines from each other. In addition to the relations

⁵²⁸Ibn al-'A tham |, *Kitāb al-Futūh*, Vol.1, p. 248.

⁵²⁹R. Jenkins and L. Westerink, *Nicholas I Patriarch of Constantinople: Letters*(Washington, 1973), p. 3.

⁵³⁰This was the also the case, earlier on, between the Byzantine and Sassanian Empires. Nina Garsoian, "Byzantium and the Sassanians," *Cambridge History of Iran*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater(Cambridge, 1983), Vol.3 part 1, pp.568-612.

in the immediate frontier zones, population exchanges, ransomed prisoners, mercenaries, and official exchanges were important factors facilitating the familiarity with each other's beliefs and institutions. Therefore, Byzantium was not a strange and wonderful land. It was relatively well-known and there was then limited room for the play of fantasy. Indeed, the Byzantines and the Muslims had a common outlook on the historical atmosphere leading from Genesis to Judgement Day. Both also had similar ethical standards and each was able to understand the slogans and reasoning of the other. The Muslims felt religiously and culturally their closest ties with the Byzantine Empire. It was the failure at an association with the Byzantines, just as much as the growing up of the Islamic State that led the Arabs at making reforms and to the replacement of Byzantine administrative techniques with Persian habits. The Persians having been politically defeated, were assimilated into the new Islamic culture.

The Arab view of Byzantium was one of respect for her military prowess, a contempt about her religious beliefs, an ambivalence towards her philosophical and scientific achievements and a lasting admiration for her craftsmanship. The Muslims understood Byzantine protocols and knew the means to impress them. The Byzantine person is often in the shadow of negative descriptions and it was to the customs, taboos, and life style of the Byzantines that the Arabs reserved their harshest criticism. However, even here, qualities are also signalled in our

texts: amenity, courage, bravery, beauty, cleanliness.

Thus, there is no generalized Byzantine behavior except, sometimes, on the level of personal characteristics, but there is no unilateral conception on the level of the Byzantine culture and civilization. Although the image represents the "Other", the different, Byzantium was not reduced to a kind of scapegoat for everything that the Arab Muslims did not like about the world surrounding them. Furthermore, we see in the Arabic sources a dialectical relation operating from Byzantium towards the Islamic world, manifested in the reaction of the Muslims to the suggestions and "advice" of the Byzantines.

We have read the Arabic texts not as delivering the external signs of a civilization, but as being this very civilization and culture. The aim was to appreciate the relation between the world as it really was and the world as it was perceived by the Arab Muslim values and conception of the world. The vision has necessarily been selective. Of course, I never expected objectivity to inhere in the texts and how can it exist given the long history of political, religious, and civilizational concern felt about the Byzantine rival. And why expect any objectivity when a great number of the texts that I have used are literary and are thus bound, like all works of literature, to bring into play many subjective factors. The discourse is bound to be vitiated. What is surprising is the temperateness of the discourse that we find in the Arabic-Islamic sources. The texts did not convey some gross simplification of Byzantine civilization in an attempt at self-delusion and we indeed find open praise of certain of its

achievements. There is a definite recognition of the "Other" and not only are the Byzantines there, but also they have an image of 'Us'. The absence of a totally reductionist vision is to the credit of the Arab Muslim writers who were able to see the "Other," other than as an image of themselves. There is no crude 'Us' vs. 'Them.' Even more, the Byzantines' own sense of justice, history, and their vision of their own society, and of that of the Muslims, is not at all irrelevant.

Naturally, on some level, in some of its aspects, Byzantium is turned into a timeless essence with the inability of the authors to perceive differences between past and present and between one place and another. The "knowledge" of Byzantium was expressed at times through the same idioms and figures of speech, although for each period, historical factors determined, to some extent, the precise content of the images. Standing as it was as a religio-cultural challenge, Byzantium came out, often, inversely equal and opposite to the Islamic civilization. Byzantium's immediacy and, at the same time, divergence from the Islamic familiar norms and reality, set it up against the Arabs.

Nevertheless, a perception that seems to be dominated by a rigid ideology, by a globality based on reductionist diagrams, conveys nuances and distinctions betraying a deeper understanding than is superficially projected, a wider comprehension than the one expected. There is no denial of a definite imposition of patterns and values, a certain avoidance of detail and on certain levels, an absence of perspective. What is

perhaps most rewarding, however, is the fact that the Muslims reveal themselves in this endeavor. In trying to perceive the "Other", the Islamic authors allowed us to have a more intimate glimpse of themselves.

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